# RITUAL AND LOCAL IDENTITY

# ON THE KERKENNAH ISLANDS OF TUNISIA

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**ABSTRACT**

Identification with place of origin is a critical resource for rural populations who are challenged by labor migration and a new national culture. It is a resource for the migrants because a claim on membership in the home community affords access to economic, political, and social networks organized on the basis of local ties. It is also a psychological anchor in the face of economic insecurity, and urban anonymity. It is a resource for the home community because it allows a reciprocal claim to be made on the migrating population, linking it to otherwise inaccessible benefits of the modern, urban, national culture.

Participation in the ritual system is the most intense and efficient way for the home and migrating segments of the Kerkennah community to reassert their connection to each other. Encoded in the life cycle and annual rituals are the cultural rules for how to be a Muslim, how to be a man or woman, and not least, how to be a Kerkenni. The ritual system is not strictly a conservative force in defining and maintaining local identity. It is also progressive in providing a forum for participating migrants to register an innovative voice.

This study makes two contributions to the discussion of the Big and Little Traditions pursued by scholars concerned with local interpretations of scriptural religions. One is that at least in an Islamic context, both the Big and Little Traditions are written in the code of gender and it is impossible to understand the interaction of the two traditions without first understanding the relationship of male and female weighted readings of the culture. The second is that in a country like Tunisia, there are not two interacting traditions, but three: the Big, the Little and the New. The New Tradition, which is nationalism, is a competitor rather than a transformation of the Big Tradition. This competition reinforces the importance of local identity.

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## PREFACE

This dissertation is a report and analysis of eighteen months' anthropological fieldwork on the Kerkennah Islands of Tunisia from May 1977 to October 1978. The Kerkennah Islands have a resident population of 14,500, but there are more than twice that number of non-resident, self-defined Kerkennis in the mainland cities of Tunisia. I spent the first fourteen months on the islands and the last four months in the mainland city of Sfax, which has the largest Kerkenni immigrant community in Tunisia.

Two things made early impressions on me which influenced the focus of the research. The first was the overwhelming tendency of people to answer the question "who are you?" (shkun inti?) with, "I am from such and such a place," and not with, "my name is X," "I'm the son of Y," or "I am a teacher." This was often the case even when the respondent's family had migrated away from that place a generation or even two back. The second was watching the depopulated desert islands become overrun with returning migrants and the quiet village life turn into round-the-clock ceremony and celebration as the summer wedding season started. These two impressions turned my attention toward the importance of local identity and ritual in Kerkenni life and their relation

to each other.

The main research technique was participant observation. I lived in an extended family household and followed all the economic, social, and ritual activities of the household and village quarter. I also made regular visits to all twelve villages and accepted invitations to as many rituals as possible in all villages, but ended up doing my most extensive interviews (unscheduled) and investigations in two villages: Ouled Bou Ali and El Attaya. Although I did not attend the mosque, most male activities were open to me as a "neutral" observer. It made perfect sense to the Kerkennis that someone would want to record their way of life. Men and women alike were enormously patient in their explanations and demonstrations of the correct Kerkenni way to do things.

The dissertation consists of six chapters. T h e first chapter is a review of Kerkennah's place in the history of the Mediterranean starting with the earliest mention of the islands by Herodotus in the 5th century B.C.,then covering the Roman, Byzantine, and early Islamic periods. This is followed by an account of the establishment of villages on Kerkennnah in the 17th century which are the basis for the contemporary social organization of the islands. The village social structure and kinship system are described. Chapter One ends with an account of how individual village identities

developed and how these are related to a shared island culture.

Chapter Two begins with a physical description of the Kerkennah Islands and their natural resources. The traditional island economy based on fixed fisheries and subsistence agriculture is described along with the clear sexual division of labor which characterizes it. Labor migration as a characteristic of third world economies and the different patterns of labor migration found in North Africa are reviewed. This is followed by a history of labor migration from Kerkennah and its impact on the traditional economy. The chapter ends with an account of prospects for the economic development of the islands.

The interplay of Big Tradition scriptural Islam and Little Tradition folk culture on Kerkennah is the subject of Chapter Three. The key cultural concepts of the Word and the Community are analyzed in terms of their universal and parochial meanings and their male and female meanings. The implications of these different readings for social roles and for local identity are developed.

Chapter Four is a comparison of male and female developmental life cycles punctuated by rites of passage. It begins with an account of the indigenous expectations about male and female moral development. Starting with the rituals of childhood, and moving through the entire life cycle, the passage from one social role to the next

is analyzed. The economic and political features of the ritual cycle for the migrant and resident parts of the community are also discussed. The importance of gender in the articulation of the local culture and the importance of the rituals in processing cyclical and progressive changes in individual roles and the community are the main focus of this chapter.

Chapter Five is an account of "Big Tradition" annual Islamic rituals and the "Little Tradition" cult of the saints. Male and female religious styles and the interaction of the parochial and the universal in Islam are discussed.

Chapter Six begins with an account of normative Islam as promoted by the Tunisian government. The introduction by the state of a competing repertoire of nationalistic holidays, heroes, and rituals in an attempt to stimulate a primary national identity is outlined. The final section evaluates the defensive role of local identity in the face of the challenge of the "new" tradition.

In the text, I have transliterated the Arabic in a simplified manner attempting to represent Kerkenni pronunciation as faithfully as possible. Classical Arabic words should be readily intelligible to the Arabist. Plurals are given in the Arabic singular with an "s" added. The `ayn is represented by ` , and the hamzah by '. For place names, I have used the conventional transliterations which are often influenced

by French, as in Ouled Bou Ali instead of Awlid Bu Ali. The glossary of selected words uses the more precise system recommended by the International Journal of Middle East Studies.

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## CHAPTER ONE

## HISTORY AND SOCIAL STRUCTURE

"The first person on Kerkennah was a woman named Kacmina. She was like a wild animal, running naked over the islands and eating raw weeds. She was fantastically beautiful. Her nakedness was covered by her hair which fell down to her ankles. One day, the son of the King of Spain, whose name was Yanka, brought a shipload of prisoners to Kerkennah. He saw the beautiful Kacmina and fell in love with her and wanted to marry her. He chased her but she ran away. She was wild and could run as fast as a gazelle. So he put a pot of very salty cooked food and a jug of fresh water on the shore and hid from sight. Kacemina ate the cooked food and became unbearably thirsty from the salt. So she drank the entire jug of water. When Yanka came out of hiding and approached her, she was so weighed down from having drunk all this water, that she could not run away. Because he was mute, Yanka wrote in the sand that he wanted to marry her. Kacemina agreed and this was their marriage contract. Yanka sent a message to the king of Spain that he was staying on Kerkennah. He told his father that it was a perfect place to lodge their prisoners of war and that he should send provisions. Kacemina and Yanka had three sons, Ali, Yank, and Kacem. They became the founders of the villages, Ouled Bou Ali, Ouled Yaneg, and Ouled Kacem."

An eighty year old Quranic healer from the Kerkenni village of Djouaber gives this mythical account of the origins of Kerkennah society. This is one of a number of stories about the origins of Kerkennah, all of which are reported with an air of historical authority. This particular story is interesting for the anthropologist to analyze because, on an abstract level, it highlights a

number of themes which situate the Kerkennah Islands physically, historically, and culturally.

The chief physical facts about Kerkennah which are alluded to in the story are its isolation, its infertility, and its shortage of fresh water. Kerkennah sits on a very shallow sub-marine plateau. The land barely emerges from the water. One third of the islands' area becomes flooded by the sea during the winter. Much of the land is too salty to grow anything but weeds and the rest is very dry and calciferous. Kerkennah's most severe physical problem is the shortage of fresh water both in terms of underground sources and rain water for human and agricultural uses. The management of the limited water supplies influences every aspect of Kerkenni life: from land use and village organization to marriage choices. Yanka managed to capture and tame the wild Kacmina because he had access to and control over the fresh water supply.

The story also underscores the idea that the "original" Kerkenni population was mixed and originated from outside. This is, in fact, historically true of the contemporary Kerkennah population. The indigenous Berber inhabitants had largely disappeared through disease and siege before the second and final "original" population started to appear on Kerkennah in the 17th century. The creation of an integrated identity for this Kerkenni population of mixed origins is figuratively addressed in

this story.

The story highlights other features which have been consistently important in Kerkennah's history and in the Kerkennis' perception of their role in history. One of these features is Kerkennah's vulnerability to intrusion by foreigners. Even during the periods when the Tunisian mainland has been under a firm administration, Kerkennah has been challenged by a long list of Mediterranean interlopers. The arrival of the mythical Yanka, who could stand for any number of European interlopers, represents this kind of intrusion. No less important is Kerkennah 's flexibility about absorbing foreign elements and influences. Over the centuries Kerkennah has been very receptive to foreign technology, new crops and activities, as well as to the immigrants from all over North Africa. Another historical characteristic that the story highlights is Kerkennah's recurring role as a depository for prisoners of war, a refuge for exiles and fugitives, and a place of banishment for outcasts, political miscreants and rejected courtesans.

The story also introduces symbolic themes that have to do with the opposing natures of men and women, their relationship, and the origins of social life. Man is represented as a civilizing force and woman as the irresponsible inspiration of sexual desire in men. When these two forces are brought together through the institution of the marriage contract, society begins.

Women are naturally wild and must be contained and protected by the institutions that are created by men. The tension between the male and the female domains and views of the world is an essential feature of Kerkennah culture and its local interpretation of Islam.

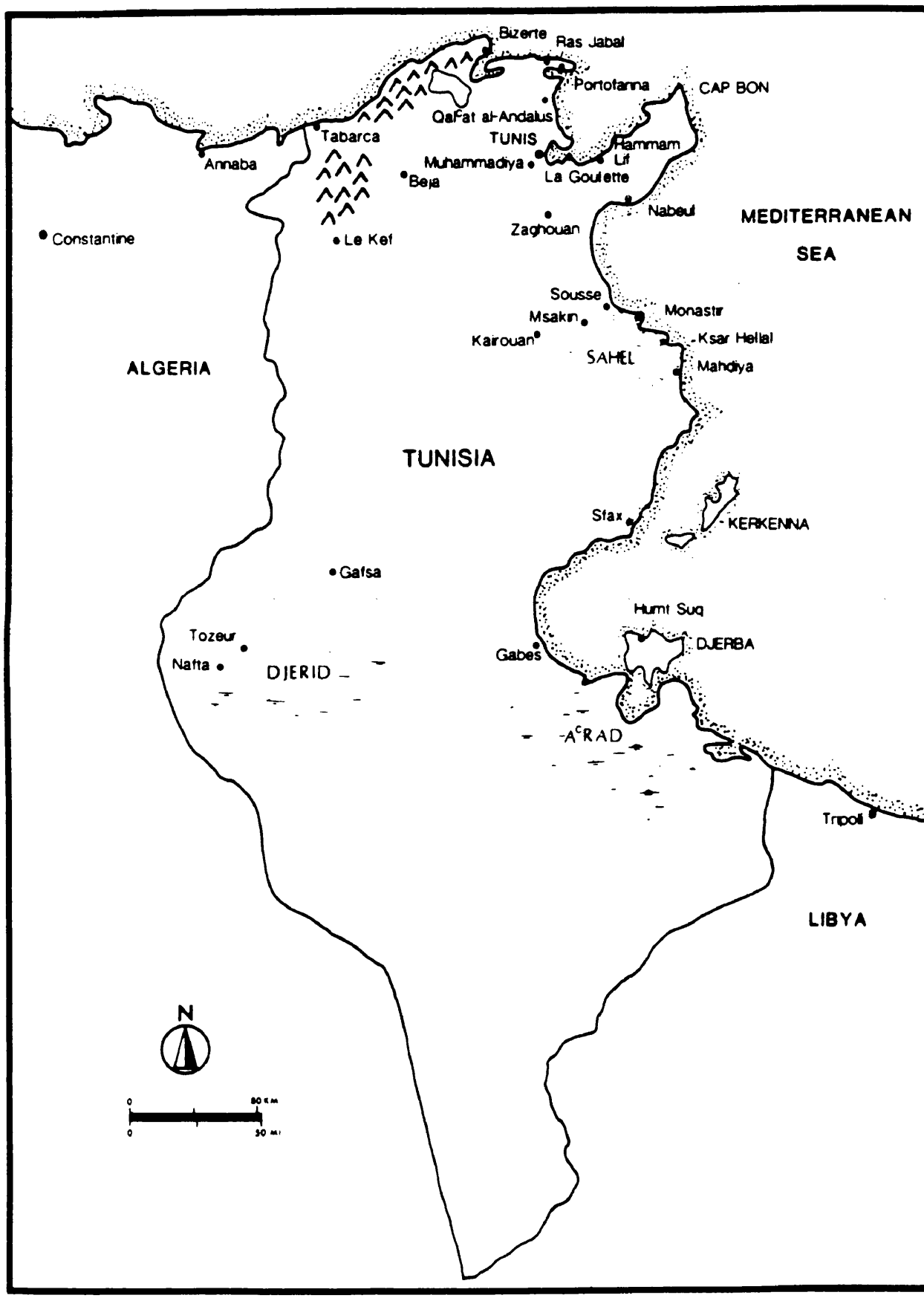
The mythical story of Yanka and Kacmina touches on thematic issues which are of recurring importance in the development of Kerkennah's historical identity. The specific emergence of these general themes will be seen in the following overview of Kerkennah's early history.

## KERKENNAH IN MEDITERRANEAN HISTORY

Kerkennah was first referred to in the historical record during the Carthaginian period, as "Cyraunis" by Herodotus, c.484-425 B.C. Although Herodotus never visited Kerkennah, he mentioned the cultivation of olive trees and vines on the islands.

> "Off their coast, as the Carthaginians report, lies an island by the name of Cyraunis, the length of which is two hundred furlongs, its breadth is not great, and which is soon reached from the mainland. Vines and olive trees cover the whole of it, and there is in the island a lake, from which the young maidens of the country draw up gold-dust, by dipping into the mud birds' feathers smeared with pitch. If this be true, I know not; I but write what is said." (Herodotus, Book 4, Ch. 195. Tr.1964:362-3)

Before the Phoenicians settled in North Africa in the ninth century B.C., there was wheat cultivation and animal herding, but arboriculture was a gift of the Phoenicians. Also referring to the Carthaginian period,




REPUBLIC OF TUNISIA

Diodorus of Sicily, 90-21 B.C., (Book V,Ch.1. Tr.1814:304) records that there was a large town on the island of "Cercinnitis" which was used as a commercial port and as a depot for prisoners of war. Thus Kerkennah was initiated in history as a place of exile. Archeological vestiges of this town and the Roman town that succeeded it can be found on the uninhabited northwest corner of the island of El Cherqui where the ruins of a Turkish fort also stand. The Kerkennis call this area El Medina, recognizing its long lost stature.

An economic shift accompanied the Roman occupation of North Africa. The mixed Punic economy of maritime commerce and minor scale agriculture gave way in the Roman era to intensive wheat cultivation. This concentration of effort encouraged the sedentarization of the population in the Tunisian Sahel (the coastal zone stretching from south of Hammamet to north of Sfax) and resulted in the growth of towns, an extensive road system and the building of cisterns, wells, and grain silos. The agricultural settlements of the Sahel that were founded at this time many centuries later became the spring from which the contemporary Kerkenni population flowed.

Physical evidence of the Roman presence on Kerkennah is found in the archeological remains of the aforementioned town with its fort, a bridge between the two main islands, a system of raised roads, several

cisterns, a catacomb, grain depots, and a relatively elegant villa with numerous rooms and mosaic floors in the contemporary village of El Abbassia. (Despois 1937:43; Guerin 1862:171).

Polybius, 198-117 B.C.,in his account of the Punic wars, tells of the arrival on "Cercinna" of the Roman consul, Cajus-Servilius Germanus, in 217 B.C. He came with a navy of 120 vessels after having ravaged the island of Djerba. According to Polybius, the inhabitants paid a ransom of ten talents of silver to keep their crops from being burned. Thus began a long history of the extraction of ransom, slaves, booty and tribute by foreign invaders and colonizers which characterized this part of the Mediterranean long into the Barbary era.

In 195 B.C., Hannibal of Carthage, fleeing a Roman extradition order, took refuge on Kerkennah en route to Syria. Approaching the island port, he saw numerous merchant vessels and merchant sailors coming out to welcome his ship. He warned his crew to say that they were on a mission from Tyre. Still fearing that his whereabouts would be reported by one of the embarking ships, he stalled them by laying on a huge feast, inviting all the sailors to take part. He got everyone drunk and quietly weighed anchor while the guests were sleeping off their stupor. (d'Avezac 1848:81). Also fleeing inhospitable conditions in Carthage, the Roman general, Marius, and his son came down the coast in a

fishing boat in 88 B.C.and took refuge on Kerkennah until his fortunes turned. (Gsell 2: 279). This is the first reference which associates Kerkennah with fishing. Although it is not documented, it is quite likely that the Kerkenni economy contributed to the supplies of dried fish that were sent to Rome from the Gulf of Gabes. More importantly, Kerkennah was a source of cereals for the African army. Caesar sent Sallust down to Kerkennah to cut off supplies to Pompeii during the Roman Civil Wars. The success of this operation resulted in Sallust being promoted to proconsul of Byzacena, which put Kerkennah under his Jurisdiction. (Gsell 1928:8:65)

Kerkennah's reputation as a place of exile for sexual miscreants began with the fourteen year residence of Cajus Sempronius Gracchus. (Today Kerkennah still has the historical reputation of being the repository for Tunisia's fallen women.) This exile was the punishment for his illicit relations with Augustus's daughter, Julia. Tiberius arranged for his execution on Kerkennah in the year 15 A.D.

This exile/retreat quality persisted into the Christian era. There is archeological evidence of Christian sanctuaries on Kerkennah dating back to the fifth century. There are also documents which suggest that a bishop, ordained in 484 named Athenius Cercinatus, was put in exile there for some unspecified offense. Although not undisputed, it has been argued that St.

Fulgentius of Ruspe (b.532) built his sixth century monastery on the Kerkennah Islands and went there to live in retreat and penance (Louis 1963:1:24).

Kerkennah's ancient role as an island of exile was renewed during the reign of the Husaynid beys which began in 1705. From this time, beylical courtesans who had fallen into disfavor or disgrace and unfaithful wives of wealthy Tunisians were banished to spend the rest of their lives on Kerkennah. This practice continued well into the nineteenth century and is confirmed in an account by L. Frank, who was the bey's physician from 1806 to 1816. (Frank 1850:63) One source singles out the village of Ouled Yaneg as the particular depository for these unfortunates. (Depois 1937:50) At the same time, Kerkennah was also the place where the beys sent eminent political prisoners who could not be disposed of less delicately.

Even in the modern era, Kerkennah continues selfconsciously to be a place of refuge and exile. In March 1945, Bourguiba, then the champion of the independence movement, took refuge on Kerkennah. Like Hannibal, he was fleeing to the East. He hid for three days in a village that has since been renamed Najet, meaning "refuge". Legend or history has it that when the French gendarmerie came looking for him, he concealed himself in a large clay storage pot like a genie.

As during the Roman occupation, the impact of the

Byzantine rule in North Africa begining in 533 was more economic than cultural. Roman influence was brought to an abrupt halt by the Vandal invasions in 429. The indigenous Berber civilization revived under the relatively undemanding Byzantine administration. It was with this local Berber culture that the Arab invaders had to contend much more than with the Byzantine occupiers. The Ummayyad Arab invaders defeated the Byzantine army on the Sbeitla plain during their first North African raid in 647 and had established themselves permanently in Tunisia by 670, only 48 years after the Hejira which marks the begining of Islam.

There is little or no mention of Kerkennah during the first three centuries of Arab rule under the Aghlabids, the Fatimids, and the Zirids. It is probable that Kerkennah was very quickly Arabized and Islamicized, unlike some of the Tunisian interior, because of its easternmost position in the Maghreb. Like all of Ifriqiya (the Maghreb), Kerkennah certainly suffered from the two centuries of anarchy brought on by the punitive invasions of the Hilal tribes of eastern Libya, starting in 1052. During this period, agricultural areas contracted, herds were raided or destroyed, unfortified towns and villages disappeared and the shrinking population fled to the mountains or the coast. The paralysis of the plains and the plateaus caused by the Hilalian invasion turned the attention of the population

to the coast and the sea and the new resources available there. This turning away from the interior toward the coast was the begining of the renowned era of Barbary piracy. (Golvin 1957). It also marks the proliferation of villages and a sedentarized life style throughout the Sahel which eventually became the source and model for life on Kerkennah.

At this time Sfax, which was well fortified (its Aghlabid wall was built in 849, making it the oldest fortified city in Tunisia) started to use Kerkennah extensively for secure pasturage. The Arab traveller, El Idrisi, reported in the twelfth century that there were no villages on Kerkennah, just people living in scattered grass huts and that the produce consisted of grapes, aniseed, jujubees, and cumin. This description was confirmed in the fourteenth century by El Tijani who said that there were no constructed houses, that the population was dispersed in huts, living by pasturage and agriculture, giving no mention of palm trees or fishing. (Despois 1937:44).

In 1135, Roger II of Sicily took advantage of the rivalry between the Hammadites and the Zirides and imposed his rule on the Ziride capital, the port of Mahdia. From there, in 1145, he launched an unsuccessful attack on Kerkennah. (Marcais 1946:224). In 1153, he tried again and this time succeeded in taking both Kerkennah and Djerba. In 1158, the Kerkennis revolted

against this Sicilian occupation. In the same year, the Almohads arrived from Morocco and took over Mahdia. By 1160, they took Kerkennah and Djerba back from the Normans of Sicily, but for the next two centuries Kerkennah and Djerba were tossed back and forth between the Sicilians and the Arabs. (Julien 1966:2:108).

In 1284, Roger of Loria with his Sicilian and Aragonese fleets took Djerba from the Hafsides and in 1287 he took Kerkennah as well. In 1295, Pope Bonifacius VIIl made Djerba and Kerkennah part of the hereditary fiefdom of Saint Siege which he presented to Roger of Loria. From 1333, there were indigenous revolts on Kerkennah against the Christian domination. Finally they regained their "independence" in 1335, although they continued to be raided by the Sicilians for several more decades. (Brunschvig 1940:I: 97).

The Aragonese navy of Alphonso V, which numbered 10,000 men, confronted the Kerkenni population of 2,000 in December 1423. (Brunschvig 1940:1:229). From 200 to 700 Kerkennis were killed and the rest were taken prisoners. The Hafside ruler, Abu Faras, failed to get his Kerkenni subjects back through an exchange of prisoners or a payment of ransom (Al Zarkachi as cited by Despois 1937:45). As a result of this disaster, when Pedro of Navarre (perhaps the mythical Yanka?) came to provision his troops on Kerkennah in 1511, he found the islands almost empty. (Despois 1937:45).

For the next century, the Tunisian coast and the islands in the Gulf of Gabes were dominated and had ransom raised from them successively by the viceroy of Sicily, Jean de Vega; the Barbary pirate, Dragut Rey; and various Spanish and Venetian aggressors. Kerkennah was further depopulated in 1576 when the Spanish Marquis of Santa Cruz sacked the islands. Reportedly about 15,000 sheep were confiscated and certainly a large part of the population would have been taken as galley slaves. The Spanish attacked Kerkennah again in 1586 and once more in 1611. The last major Christian interference until the French came in the nineteenth century was a short series of occupations by the Venetians between 1620 and 1652. This long series of blows most probably brought an end to the original and indigenous Kerkenni social organization and economy.

## THE NEW KERKENNAH

By the middle of the seventeenth century, Tunisia and the Gulf of Gabes were quite firmly under Ottoman control. The stability that the Turks brought to the eastern Maghreb made Tunisia an attractive place in which to settle. In the early 17th century 60,000 to 80,000 Moors came to Tunisia from Spain, as did thousands of Italian Jews (Tessler 1973:209). During this period there were also large migrations from Morocco which lead to a flowering of maraboutism in Tunisia. Many people

from the East came, attracted by the Turkish regime. All of these immigrants contributed to the complex ethnic and cultural mixture that is so characteristic of north and coastal Tunisia.

As the Spaniards and Venetians were expelled from the Maghreb by the Turks, Kerkennah began to be repopulated by immigrants largely from the Sahel, but also from the Tunisian interior, Djerba, Tripolitania, and Morocco. The oldest families on Kerkennah trace their origins back to the mainland from this period. The severe depopulation followed by a large influx from such a variety of places helps to explain why there is no true Kerkenni physical type whereas there is an indigenous Djerbi type. These "new" Kerkennis probably never completely replaced the original Berber population, but they were the founding members of contemporary Kerkennah society. No current Kerkenni family claims to have originated on Kerkennah, although they all ideologically claim it as the place where their family is historically rooted. It is the village structure, type of agriculture, fishing technology and style of Islam that they brought with them from various places that became the foundation for the distinctive Kerkenni way of life and social identity.

The Sahelian custom of living in villages represented a radical and irreversible shift in the social organization of the islands starting in the late

16th century. The vulnerable north coast, where most of the Roman settlements had been, was abandoned and the remaining pastoralists that had been living in huts scattered in their pastures and gardens consolidated with the mainland immigrants into a string of villages along the south coast of the larger island. The first historical mention of village organization was made shortly after 1576 in an anonymous Spanish report ("Relacion anonima de los meritos y servicios de d. Alvaro de Bazan" cited by Depois 1937:45) at which time there were seven villages and the population was estimated to be between 3,000 and 4,000. Initially divisions between and within these new villages were loosely established on the basis of mainland places of origin, although numerous internal migrations have blurred these lines considerably.

In her book, Fellah Tunisiens: l'economie rurale et la vie des campagnes aux 18e et 19e siècles, Lucette Valensi reports that in the 18th and 19th centuries there was a remarkable degree of geographical mobility among the villages of the Tunisian Sahel. This is in paradoxical contrast to the nomadic tribes of this era who actually had much more territorial stability in the north and central plains than the "settled" village dwelling peoples of the coast and the Sahel (Valensi 1977:24-27). Given this fluidity, the gradual repopulating of Kerkennah and the importation of village

social structure, architecture and spacial organization can be seen as a characteristic product of this general phenomenon.

Valensi's account of 18th and 19th century rural society also puts migration **away** from the islands into a helpful historical perspective. Her analysis of the first national census made in 1856 reveals that already one out of five Kerkennis were living on the mainland (Valensi 1977:26). This indicates that leaving the islands to look for improved circumstances was a "normal" feature of Kerkenni life from early on and not strictly a response to modernization or economic catastrophe as it might appear. (This is not to say that the proportions immigration has now assumed - one Kerkenni on the islands for every two away - does not make this a qualitatively different phenomenon. This will be discussed in a Chapter Two.) How, when, and why these Kerkennis maintain their Kerkenni identity is a central question in the present work. First, however, the question of what this identity consists must be addressed. A first step is to consider the nature of the villages which replaced the tribal way of life.

What makes a village different from a tribe and different from a city? Villages and tent dwelling tribes in Tunisia are two different forms of rural life that are not intimately interdependent in the way that the nomadic tribe and the city have been presented starting with Ibn

Khaldun's elegant 14th century analysis, nor the way the village and the city have been portrayed in studies of patron-client relations. (Pitt-Rivers 1954, Campbell 1964). In the context we are looking at, the tribe and the village each have their own interdependent relation to the city, but not so much with each other. Nor are they different stages on a developmental spectrum. The village, in other words, is not a city writ small, nor is a tribe a village waiting to come into being.

A tribe is a "geometrical entity of allegiances based on family relationships" (Valensi 1985:32). Ideologically, at least, it is a lineage based organization in which kinship and politics are treated in the same social idiom. As Valensi adroitly puts it,

> "Genealogy, an ideological construct, reveals itself not as an account of the past, but as an allegory of the present, a translation of political, religious, and matrimonial practices. At the same time, this construct contributes to the preservation and reproduction of the economic order and social praxis.... Whether pertaining to political, matrimonial, or economic affairs, the genealogical structure provides a matrix for the many possible practices (Valensi 1985:57).

Theoretically, the tribe has the capacity to act as a corporate group and certainly its ultimate identity is underwritten by this guarantee.

Neither the village nor the lineage segments found in the village operate or are seen as corporate groups. The village is made up of distinct patrilineal, patrilocal households. This (household) unit and the village itself are the critical rungs on the ladder of social identity.

Kinship and politics overlap in many instances, but the lineage is not the effective organizing principle for the social system nor is it an absolute principle for residential patterns within the village. People can specify all the major families residing in different quarters of their village, but they do not all ascend to a common ancestral root either historically or figuratively. Not everyone clearly belongs to a lineage. Although this has its disadvantages, too, the household unit in the village potentially has much more autonomy than the comparable unit in a tribe. While there is lineage heteorogeneity within the village, it is ethnically and religiously homogeneous. The village is both closed to and threatened by all categories of "strangers", unlike the city which is defined by its diverse and anonymous populations. (It should be noted that the issue of hospitality to strangers is quite separate from the issue of strangers actually being absorbed into the community.)

The village economy is basically a peasant economy, meaning it is oriented toward subsistence rather than reinvestment, there is a coincidence of the producing and consuming unit, little division of labor, and little conspicuous differences in wealth. Crafts and other economic specialties are carried out on a secondary and part-time basis with people generally all absorbed in the same major economic activities. Village identity depends

on people being **known** and, in some deep sense, equivalent to each other. One could say that as tribal identity is based on an ideology of kinship, village identity is based on an ideology of equality. On Kerkennah this is what I call the "kif-kif ethic." Kif-kif literally means "same-same" and along with numerous hand gestures indicating parallelism and equivalence, it is constantly evoked to describe mutuality and equality within the village.

Just as critical to village solidarity as the ideology of equality within the village, is the sense of being different from neighboring villages. And usually, the closer the village, the more dramatically the difference between the two is emphasized. On Kerkennah the differences tend to center, not surprizingly, around the subjects of sex, violence, and drinking. Abu Zahra finds the same thing in Sidi Ameur:

"The villagers of Sidi Ameur consider themselves to be different from the inhabitants of Ouardenine, whom they accuse of being murderers, thieves, and gangsters, and whom they further accuse of drinking alcohol when they are in Sousse." (Abu Zahra 1982:18).

Paul Stirling reports his experience of this in A Turkish Village:

The virtues of the village are the eternal topic of conversation with outsiders, and of banter between men of different villages. Every village has the best drinking water, and the best climate.....Every village is more hospitable, more honourable, more virile, more peaceable, gives better weddings, than any of its neighbours. Other villages are savage, mean, dishonourable, lying, lazy, cowardly. Neither Sakaltutan nor Elbasi found my choice of them surprising, but everyone else found it quite

incredible. (Stirling 1965:40).

The village is a single community in the sense of having a commonly recognized social space, an informal set of social control mechanisms based on face to face knowledge (and hearsay!) to which no one in the village is immune, and a shared identity that persists in the face of the constant realignment of internal factions which are based on the interplay of political, economic and matrimonial networks.

The city, as we said, absorbs strangers and is economically and socially diverse. It is "a place where administrative, religious and commercial activities are concentrated at the same time as ethnic and social diversity converge" (Valensi 1985:4). To the villager the city is a necessary evil: necessary as a source of goods and services and as an outlet for Kerkenni produce and crafts and "evil" as the administrator of the intrusion and constraint of the government. Along with the other characteristics of village social organization imported to Kerkennah came the ambivalent, hostile, competitive, and dependent relationship to the city.

Just as dramatic as the development of villages on Kerkennah was the shift in the base of the economy from transhumant animal husbandry to fishing and agriculture. The system of land tenure and rights to exploitation that these new enterprises depended on were organized and maintained by a village rather than a lineage political

structure. They also depended on "new" technologies that were imported from the mainland. Fixed fisheries, called sharfiyya, (which are configurations of palm fences planted in the shallow banks which direct the fish into enclosures housing a number of fish traps) had been in use along the Sfax coast since the 10th and 11th centuries, but their appearance and the palms that they depend on for raw materials are not mentioned on Kerkennah until the 17th century (Despois 1937:44). The settlers on the south coast found the double row of shallow banks both good for security and for fixed fisheries. This form of fishing flourished in this setting and has become a distinctive emblem of Kerkennah, recognized as such throughout Tunisia.

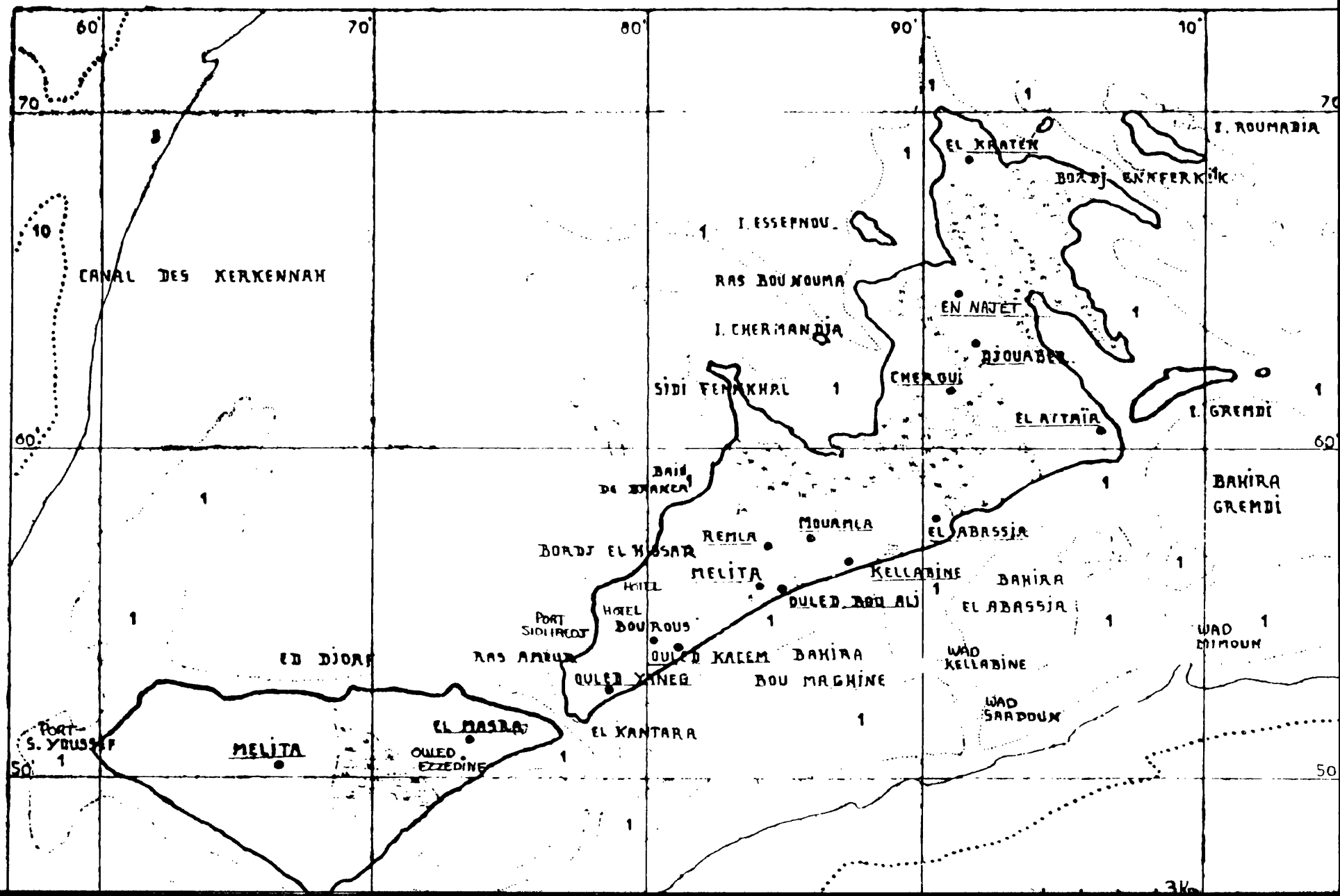
## KERKENNAH SOCIAL STRUCTURE

There are twelve villages on the two islands with a total population of 14,500. Some of the villages have coastal or farming hamlets associated with them. They vary in population size from 3,393 (Melitta on El Gharbia) to 661 (Cherqui).

| Village | Associated Hamlets | Pop.1975 |
|---|---|---|
| Melitta | El Masra | 3393 |
| El Najet w/ Kraten | El Nakhla, Khecharem | 2869 |
| El Attaya | | 2487 |
| Remla | El Hay, Mouamla | 2407 |
| Ouled Bou Ali | Melitta Sgir | 847 |
| Kellabine w/ El Abbassia | | 740 |
| Ouled Kacem | Bou Rous | 641 |
| Cherqui w/ Djouaber | Djebli, Bir Dimes, Bou Nouma | 611 |
| Ouled Yaneg | | 505 |
| | | 14,500 |
| | | (Tunisia 1975) |

TABLE 1. Kerkennah population 1975.

The first villages on Kerkennah were the interior villages of Melitta (now a hamlet attached to the coastal village of Ouled Bou Ali) and Cherqui. Kellabine was the earliest of the coastal villages and was traditionally the administrative center of the islands. Then came the other coastal villages and the development of the fishing economy: El Attaya, Ouled Kacem, Ouled Bou Ali, and later, Ouled Yaneg which is thought to be the place where the beys sent their rejected courtesans. Kraieb (now called Najet after Bourguiba's famous interlude there) was founded by a family from Djerba who brought with them specialist knowledge of sponge fishing. Remla and Djouaber are interior villages but, like Cherqui, have coastal fishing hamlets associated with them. Conversely, families from several of the coastal villages have little seasonal camps in the interior near their




*L'archipel des Kerkena.* Echelle 1 176.344

adapted from A. Louis (1

Les Iles Kerkennah

gardens from which plowing, planting and harvesting operations are carried out. Kraten and El Abbasia were breakaway villages established by families from Najet and Ouled Yaneg respectively. The island of Melitta was largely deserted until the late 18th century except for the little agricultural hamlet of El Masra. The new village of Melitta was established by an internal migration from the old hamlet of Melitta on the eastern island. With successive immigrations from the continent, this newest village has also become the most populous.

Early population figures for Kerkennah are scarce and not clearly reliable. The figures available are as follows:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1836 | 7,000 | (Pellissier 1853:109) |
| 1890 | 8,671 | (Louis 1963:1:38) |
| 1921 | 14,086 | (Louis 1963:1:38) |
| 1936 | 15,130 | (Bernard 1937:84) |
| 1946 | 14,535 | (Louis 1963:1:38) |
| 1956 | 13,704 | (Tunisia 1956) |
| 1966 | 12,566 | (Tunisia 1966) |
| 1975 | 14,500 | (Tunisia 1975) |
| 1984 | 14,451 | (Tunisia 1984) |

TABLE 2. Kerkennah population 1836 - 1984.

What is striking about these figures is the relative stability of the size of the population from 1921 to the present. Kerkennah's normal population growth has been balanced by a steadily increasing rate of immigration to the mainland cities. Paradoxically, this large exodus has had the effect of stabilizing Kerkennah's social and economic structure. Even internally, the distribution of

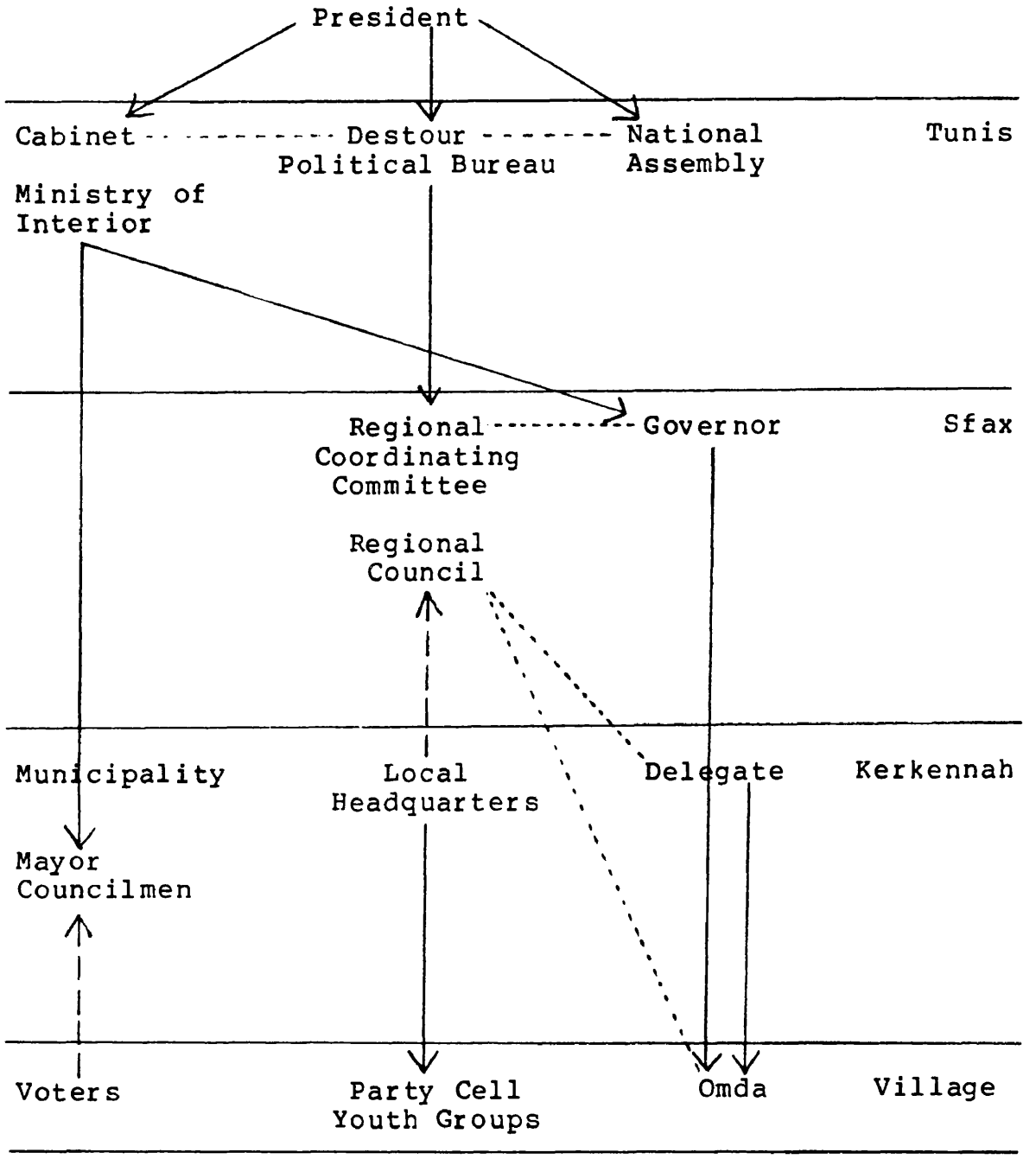
the population among the villages has been fairly stable. (See Table 3). The relatively large growth in the village of Remla has been due to the building of a new administrative district (El Hay) where all of the government offices and services for all of Kerkennah have been concentrated since the late 1960's. (Note: because these figures come from three different sources and because the boundaries of the units changed from decade to decade, they cannot be treated as absolutely accurate and comparable. They are useful instead to give a general picture of shifts in village population.)

| | 1946 | 1956 | 1966 | 1975 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Melitta | 2,252 | 2,519 | 2,969 | 3,393 |
| El Najet w/ Kraten | 2,252* | 2,405 | 2,575 | 2,869 |
| El Attaya | 2,008 | 2,004 | 2,023 | 2,487 |
| Remla | 2,203 | 1,972 | 1,784 | 2,407 |
| Ouled Bou Ali | 2,590 | 2,221 w/ Ouled Kacem | 661 | 847 |
| Kellabine w/ El Abbassia | 1,212 | 896 | 653 | 740 |
| Ouled Kacem | //////////// | | 791 | 641 |
| Cherqui w/ Djouaber | 953 | 946 | 951 | 611 |
| Ouled Yaneg | 1,065 | 741 | 479 | 505 |

Table 3. Kerkennah population by village 1946 - 1975. *Louis (1963:1:38) records this coincidental figure. I was unable to verify it.

Administratively, Kerkennah is divided into nine

units because of the small size of some of the villages. Each of the nine administrative units is called a sheikhat and has an omda, who is an appointed local representative working as an ombudsman for the Delegation (ma`tamdiya) of the Governerat (wilaya) of Sfax. (There are twenty governerats in the Republic of Tunisia.) The Delegate is appointed by the regional governor and normally comes from outside the area in an attempt to reduce local corruption and favoritism. The omda, however, does come from the sheikhat he serves, for his local knowledge and prestige is thought to be important in communicating the policies of the government to the local community. The whole of Kerkennah is simultaneously a regional unit (ma`tamdiyya) of the governerat and a single municipality (baladiyya) with an elected mayor and municipal council. Both the delegation and the municipality are under the direct control of the Ministry of the Interior. In addition to the Municipality and the Delegation, there is a Kerkennah-wide local headquarters of President Bourguiba's Destourian Socialist Party with party cells and youth groups in each of the villages. Although the Delegation, Municipality, and the Party are technically separate agencies on Kerkennah, at the regional level there is a great deal of institutionalized overlapping of offices and functions. (See Figure 1).




Power to appoint and dismiss ————————

Overlapping membership ·····

Popular Election — — — — —

FIGURE 1. National, regional and local political organization. Adapted from Area Handbook for the Republic of Tunisia (1970:186).

On the local level, the overlapping of personnel between the agencies is informal but very common. For example, the mayor and the city councilmen are all prominent members of the local party headquarters. One of the councilmen is the head of his village party cell and another is the head of the local trade union. The head of the clinic, a Ministry of Health appointment, is also head of the Kerkennah party headquarters. The mayor, the head of the trade union (also a councilman,) and his brother, the head of his village party cell, are all married to three sisters. This uninstitutionalized overlapping of personnel is not discouraged because it can contribute to the centralization of power which prevents the development of a strong grass roots opposition.

The political power structure outlined above is entirely generated and maintained from outside Kerkennah, although the personnel filling the offices are often local. There is also an indigenous power structure that is generated and maintained at the level of the village. Most of the relevant institutions in this system are explicitly religious including the mosque, the Our'anic school, and the maraboutic shrines which are found in every village. Elites rise through their reputation for a combination of specialist knowledge (`alm), wisdom (`aql), religious grace (baraka), and family honor (`ard). Personal influence (ktif, literally, shoulder)

and wealth are also relevant. The traditional religious elite include the imam and muezzin (prayer leader and caller to prayer of the mosque), the meddeb (Qur'an teacher), and the hafidh (marabout guardian). Medical and ritual specialists such as the tbib `arabi (traditional healer), qabbla (midwife), and circumcisor who is usually the barber, hajjam, also wield a good deal of power within the realm of the village.

Although the villages of Kerkennah vary considerably in size, the basic composition is the same. Every village has at least one mosque (El Attaya and Remla have two) and a number of maraboutic shrines of varying sizes. (Ouled Bou Ali, a village of 847 persons, has twelve shrines, three of which are substantial in the sense of drawing visitors from outside the village.) Every village has something resembling a village square (wust el blad) where the mosque, small shops, political offices and other male dominated institutions are located. The public water sources, which are female dominated, are never near to the village square. There are three kinds of residences. The overwhelming majority are traditional Arab houses (dar `arabi) consisting of clusters of rooms opening onto an interior courtyard. These kinds of houses are clustered in neighborhoods roughly based on concentrations of related families. The residential quarter is the space within which a woman can circulate freely without worrying about her honorable reputation.

Visits to other quarters or the village square, wust el blad, require a good and specific reason. Along the shore, (traditionally an undesirable place to live), and on the outskirts of the village, modern vacation villas are springing up built by successful emigrè villagers. Most villages now also have a new neighborhood of small, orderly, government subsidized houses (dar populaire) which are inhabited by newcomers (barrani, literally, foreigner) and newlyweds who do not live with the husband's parents.

The most basic and important social unit in the village is the dar which refers to the patrilineal, patrilocal extended family. In its broadest application, a dar can include all of the sons, and their wives and descendants, of a common father who may or not be living. For the term to be used in this way, the members of the dar would normally live in the same quarter of the village, share or have shared common property, participate in each others' life cycle rituals, be involved in work exchanges, and promote the intermarriage of their children. In its narrowest application, dar refers to the nuclear family and would normally be used in this way to describe a residential and commensal unit. Dar also means the actual physical house in which the family lives.

A collection of related dars form an `arsh which is a patrilineal descent group recognizing a common ancestor

(jidd lawwil, meaning "the first grandfather".) This usually means the first ancestor to come to Kerkennah from the mainland. The tracing of descent is often imprecise and rarely can be traced back more than five generations. People have a much clearer sense of the contemporary breadth than the historical depth of their `arsh. Dars in the same village often see themselves as related to each other and qrib (close) without explicitly identifying themselves as being from the same `arsh.

In a Moroccan context, Dale Eickelman has written extensively about the concept of closeness, qariba, which he defines as "acting as if ties of obligation exist with another person which are so compelling that they are generally expressed in the idiom of kinship." (1976:96). He goes on to build a whole theory of social relations out of this concept. On Kerkennah, I only heard people use qrib to describe actual kinship relations with other dars (not individuals), but it did have the same flavor of multiple ties of cooperation and obligation.

A vaguer term than `arsh that is used to refer to a patrilineal grouping larger than the dar is `aiyla which literally means family. This term does not have a particular geneological reference, but is used when people want a blanket term for being related: fard `aiyla, "same family." When people want to refer to unrelated village dars with whom they have good cooperative relations, they simply say, "we go together,"

nimciu ma`b`adna.

An `arsh might be concentrated in one village, but not necessarily, and not every dar would claim to be part of an `arsh. There is only one community on Kerkennah where all of the dars are from the same `arsh, the farming hamlet of Ouled Ezziddine (also called El Masra) on the island of Gharbi. This residential kin group is also unusual for Kerkennah in that they see themselves primarily as farmers rather than fishermen. This `arsh is also heavily represented in the village of Ouled Bou Ali on the island of Cherqui. Although an `arsh does not necessarily have a single residential location, it is sometimes affiliated with a particular saint or set of saints to whom a genealogical or mystical relationship is claimed. (A fuller account of the role of saints on Kerkennah is presented in Chapter Five.) The saint might be the jidd lawwil of an `arsh as in the case of Sidi Abdelqader of the Shillee `arsh which has dars in Ouled Bou Ali and El Attaya. Or he might have been "adopted" by an `arsh which had a history of particular benefit from that saint as in the case of Sidi Messaoud and the Chackshouk `arsh in Ouled Bou Ali. In either case, the maraboutic shrine becomes a favorite site for any number of rituals in which members of the `arsh are expected to participate. In fact, the only time the `arsh might come together en masse would be for major ritual occasions.

Unlike the dar, the `arsh mostly functions as a

conceptual framework which can be appealed to for a number of different reasons, but which is not a constant feature in the organization of everyday village life. `Arsh affiliation can be used to establish seniority and prestige in the village. It can be used as a basis for settling or calling for support in disputes. It can also be activated to initiate marriage negotiations or to gain entrance into economic and political networks outside of the village.

The dar, as we said, does have a location associated with it, whether it is a village quarter or an actual house. The scope and definition of a particular dar varies according to where the domestic group is in its developmental cycle. Marriage is virilocal and traditionally the bride comes to live in the household of her affines, nsib. (This comes from the word, nasab, which in some Arab contexts means descent or lineage, but in Tunisia always refers to affines.) The bride and her husband have their own room, beit, which would often be a newly built cell in the honeycomb of the household complex. Upon marriage, the bride's labor is transferred to the interests of her father-in-law, her sidi (literally her "master," but used generally in Tunisia to address a male respectfully) and under the direction of her mother-in-law.

The general kin term for mother-in-law is mart `ammi which means "my father's brother's wife." This term

emphasizes the point that the ideal marriage partner is the patrilateral parallel cousin, in other words, the closest allowable relative from the same dar in its broader manifestation of the patrilateral extended family. Of course, such a close cousin is not always available or, in fact, the most desirable candidate for other reasons, but this preference is commonly stated and often followed. The next best thing is to marry qrib and within the village. A marriage outside the `arsh, but within the village, is often preferred to a cousin marriage outside the village. This would be because of the beneficial networks of cooperation already operating between the unrelated dars in the village through earlier marriage alliances or other associations.

It often happens that the new domestic situation is too close for the comfort of the daughter-in-law and after a certain amount of time (usually after she has acquired some stature by bearing a son), she will campaign for her own house. The minimum requirement would be having her own kitchen. This is where the definition of the dar becomes complicated. She and her husband might continue to live in their bridal beit, having given it a new external door and attached to it a new cooking room, kuchina. The son's wife would now have more autonomy within her own small nuclear family mostly in terms of housekeeping and cooking, but she would still work cooperatively on her sidi's property with the other

son's wives under the direction of her mart `amm and share in the life of the extended household in a multitude of other ways. (The organization of work parties and the household economy is discussed in Chapter Two.)

The difficulty of defining the boundaries of the household is reflected in the Tunisian National Census which counts both logements (structurally independent buildings or sets of rooms with one or more entrances onto a public passage) and ménages (a group of people related or not in the same lodging taking their meals together.) In the village of Ouled Kacem in 1975, there were 298 logements and 197 ménages in a population of 641 individuals. (Tunisia 1975). This means that one third of the groups that see themselves as a commensal unit or as a dar in its narrower sense, have within them domestic units which are in some ways spatially autonomous. I would speculate that these figures are somewhat inaccurate because there is a high social and religious value placed on sharing food and an inclusive version of the ménage might be given as the "right answer" to the census-taker. Nevertheless, the main point here is that the working boundaries of the household expand and contract depending on the everyday context and the stage at which the domestic group finds itself in the developmental cycle.

In general, the son's wife would gain more autonomy

as she has more children and her husband prospers, as new son's wives are added to the domestic group, and perhaps after the death of her sidi and the division of the patrimony. Materially, this would mean a separate household with its own internal courtyard, although perhaps adjacent to and sharing walls with the original dar. Eventually, this woman would become a mart `amm herself and her own household would undergo the same process of expansion and subdivision. This is how a village quarter becomes a complex concentration of related dars. Of course, there are many variations in this developmental process depending on the number of married sons, the life chances of education and employment away from Kerkennah, and the dispositions of the personalities involved, to name a few of the variables. The subdivision of the extended family household does not change the fact that for the most part the village is made up of quarters or neighborhoods which have no actual boundaries, but which are concentrations of related and allied dars that are constantly undergoing a process of transformation as each domestic group moves through the developmental cycle.

Figure 2 shows the households in a particular quarter in the village of Ouled Bou Ali which is typical of the older sections of any village on Kerkennah. Like the dar, the invisible boundaries of the quarter are somewhat elastic. This quarter, is dominated by two large dars,

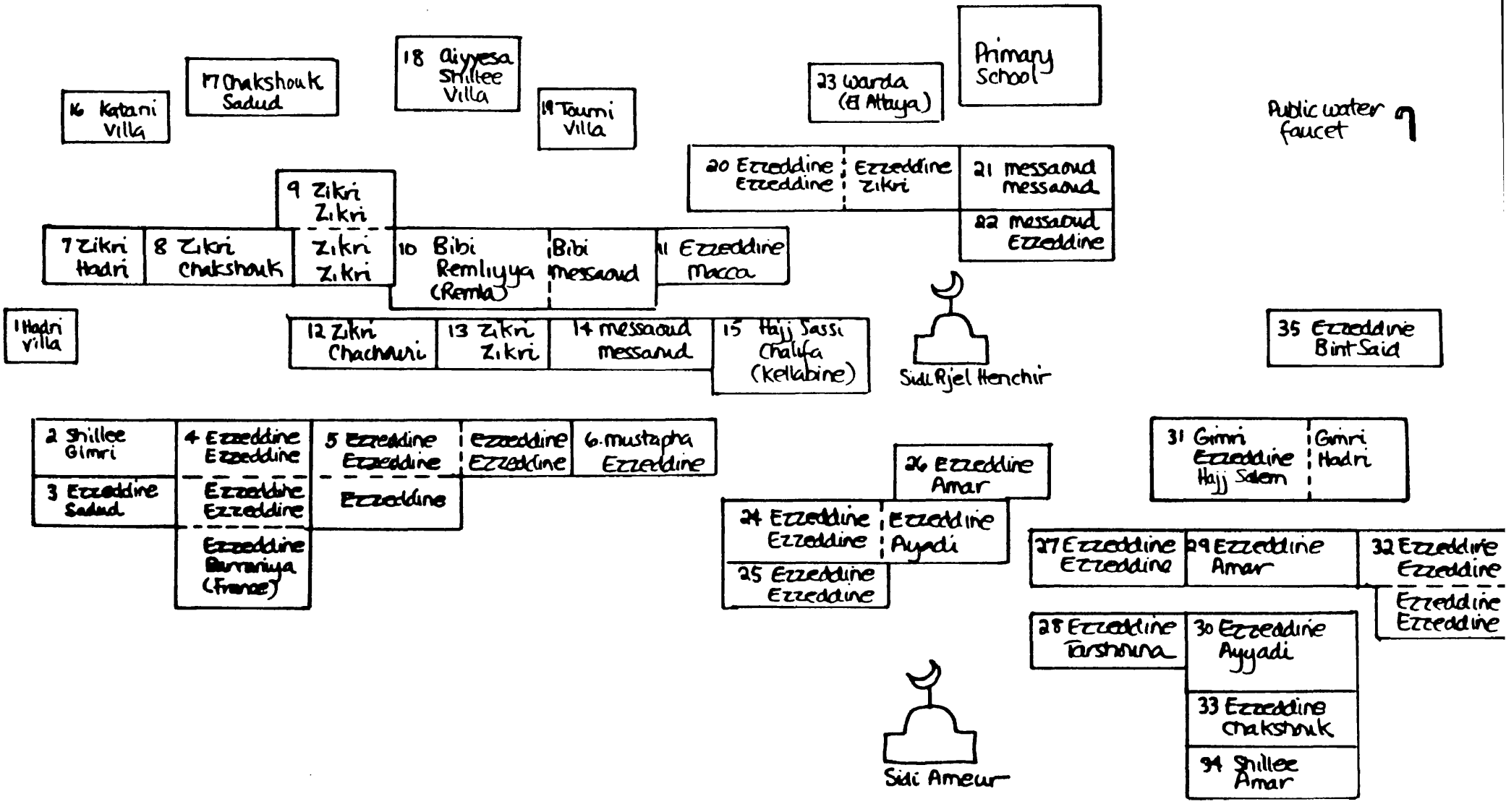



Figure 2. Village quarter, Ouled Bou Ali.
Note: Each pair of names represents a married couple. Husband's name is above wife's.
Dotted line indicates extended household.

the Zikris and the Ezzedines. Not all their affiliated households live here, many of them being married into other village dars and many of them living outside the islands or in other villages. Of the thirty-five households shown, eight are extended families including one or more married sons and their families who still live, eat, work, and share resources as one unit (4,5,9,10,20,24,31,35). Of thirty-nine married couples in residence, fifteen married within the wider definition of their own dar. This does not mean that they all married their actual bint `amm (father's brother's daughter), but that they married qrib. Of the thirty-nine marriages, twenty-three were with another dar within the village and two were with another dar from another village. One elderly man has two wives, both from different dars within the village (31). (Polygyny was banned by the Personal Status Code in 1956, but the 3% of the Tunisian population then already involved in multiple marriages were allowed to maintain them [Perkins 1986:124].) One man came from another village to work as the primary school principal (23). One man married a French woman (4). Of the thirty-five households, four are modern villas built by members of village dars who have gone to the mainland to work and who occupy these villas during the summer and holidays (1,16,18,19). Many of these households have rooms prepared for the seasonal visits of married sons and

knife.

Village centrism is so strong that while nearly everyone will have been to Sfax, it is not unusual for people never to have been to their immediate neighboring villages. This is more true for women than for men. With the exception of visiting relatives or a favorite saint's shrine, people seem to avoid rather than look forward to visiting other villages. "I have no people there." "We have what we need here." Upon contact with Sfax, however, Sfax becomes the next nearest object of judgement and contempt and defensive village identity becomes island identity. "On Kerkennah we do not have a single beggar. Our poor don't have to ask. We just give." "Women in Sfax sell their wedding jewelry to make cakes for the _`id_. Each has to be better than the other."

Although there is a very clear overarching island identity that is aroused in the face of challenges from the outside, this does not displace village identity. In this sense, Kerkennah does not operate like a segmentary system. It is rare for two villages to form an alliance against a third. Corporateness ends with the _dar_ and beyond that people have a large number of ways of forming cross cutting alliances. In other words, island identity is not simply a "bigger" version of village identity in a telescoping system of expanding circles. Village identity is a cluster of social, political, and economic

statements about that local community which has a concrete everyday embodiment. In this way it is a very powerful and practical tool. Island identity is different in that it is not based on a community where everyone is known on a daily face-to-face basis. It is based on a shared environment and relationship to that environment. It is captured in the term blad, which Kerkennis use to refer to their homeland, place of origin, and social center of gravity. To be a wild or bint el blad means to be a loyal native son or daughter and privy to the special knowledge associated with that place. Ali Najib in a study of a rural community in southern Morocco, found the term used in the same way:

> "The term blad means `region' or `locality', but it has a deeper connotation of `sense of place' than is suggested by the term locality. Blad implies a special relation between man and his environment. It is the region from which a social group draws its sustenances and its distinctive traits. To identify someone as being from Blad-Wedinoon is to imply that he/she has those characteristics of manner, knowledge, relationships, and modes of interaction that have come to be associated with Tekna society in Wedinoon. For Tekna, the sense of place is the source of social identity. Thus to know a man's origin is to know something about how he may think, act, and form relationships with others." (Najib 1986:8).

In a similar sense, island identity is almost a philosophical statement about the self in the community. When people talk about being Kerkenni, they are talking about how people use their intelligence, how they work and their attitudes toward the material world. We turn now to an account of this material world.

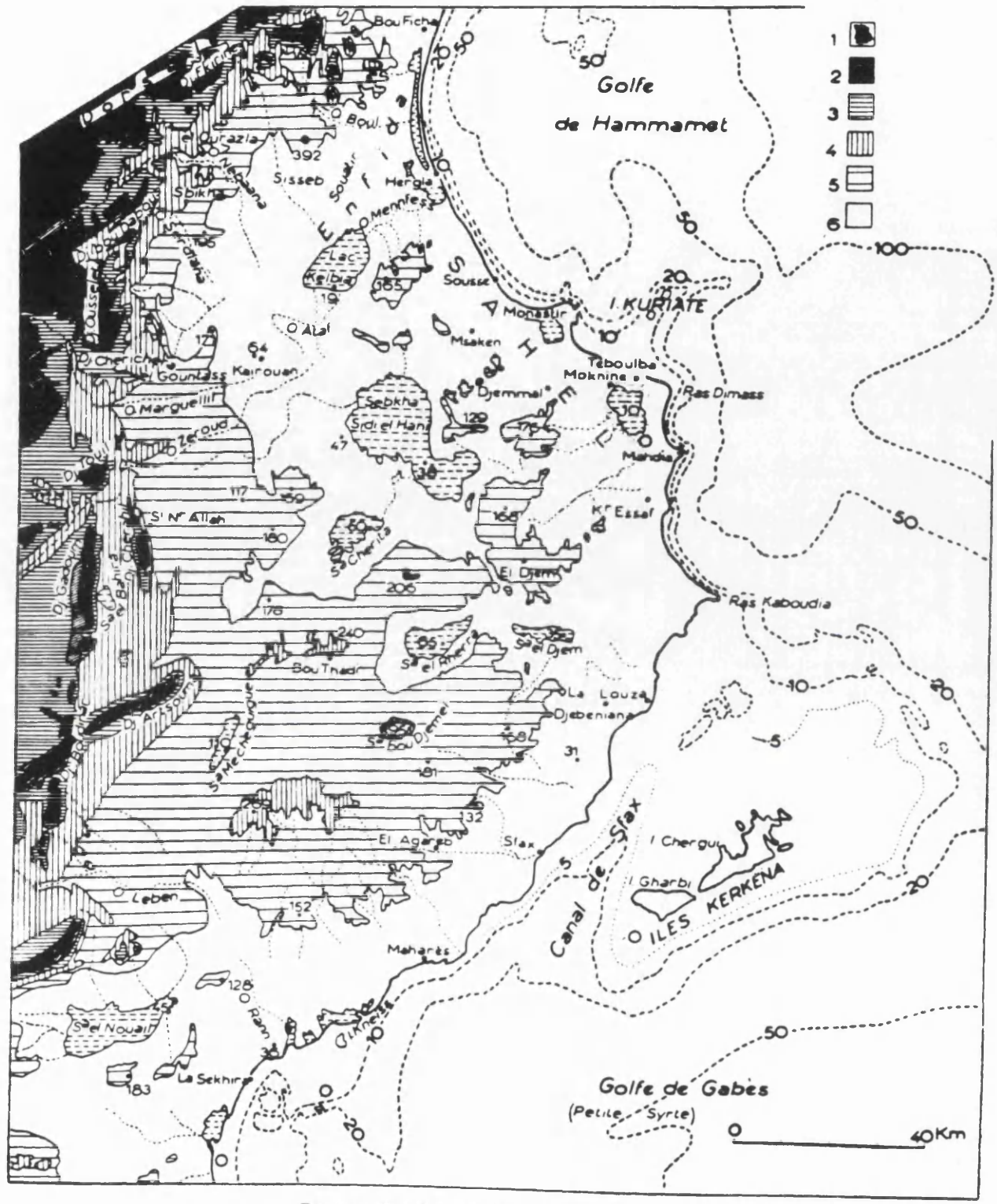
## CHAPTER TWO

## GEOGRAPHY AND ECONOMY

### AN OASIS IN THE SEA

The Kerkennah Islands can be described as an oasis in the middle of a large wet desert. The sea that surrounds Kerkennah is like a desert because it is so shallow that it must be treated more like land than like sea. When the tide is out, Kerkennah is surrounded by sandy flats that extend almost as far as the eye can see. When the tide is in, the water is still so shallow, that one can walk more than a kilometer in many directions and be only waist-deep in water. Much like the "dry" desert, this submarine plateau is sandy and infertile. It is difficult to navigate, and as a result, the islands have a peculiar kind of double insularity. Adaptation to and exploitation of these unusual characteristics tells a lot about the Kerkennah economy, but also about Kerkenni local identity.

Comparing the submarine plateau that Kerkennah is perched on to a desert is not just an appealing physical analogy. In many ways the Kerkennis, themselves, conceptualize and treat this shallow sea as land. This applies not only to their manner of speaking ,(the submarine landscape is labelled with many "landmarks"), but also to their property rights system and technology.


Golfe
de Hammamet
Golfe de Gabès
(Petite Syrte)
I. KURIATE
Mahdia
Ras Kaboudia
Ras Dimass
Téboulba
Moknine
Djemmal
Sebkha
Sidi el Hani
Kairouan
Sousse
Monastir
Msaken
Hergla
Sisseb
Menzel
Lac Kelbia
Bou Ficha
Bou Thadi
Sidi el Djem
El Djem
La Louza
Djebeniana
Sidi Bou Djemel
El Agareb
Sfax
Canal de Sfax
I. Chergui
I. Gharbi
ILES KERKENA
Maharès
Leben
Sidi el Noual
La Sekhira
Oued Rann
Oued Marguelil
Oued Zeroud
Oued Chérichira
Oued Sidi el Hani
Oued Merguellil
Oued Sidi Amor Bou Hajla
Oued Sidi Mechreg
Oued Akarit
Oued Gabès
Oued Lakhdar
Oued Baccouche
Oued Chiba
Oued Ben Hassen
Oued Ben Ali
Oued Ben Ali
Oued Ben Ali

The analogy goes a little further still in that many aspects of the island socio-economic system are parallel to those of a real oasis both in terms of constraints and organization.

The Kerkennah archipelago consists of two large inhabited islands and five little inconsequential islets. The two large inhabited islands are called El Gharbia and El Cherquia, meaning "the Western" and "the Eastern" respectively. The western most point of El Gharbia, where the main port at Sidi Youssef is located is 19.5 kilometers away from the mainland city of Sfax. Running end to end, the two islands together are 37 kilometers long. They have a combined land mass of 150 square kilometers.

Approached from a distance, Kerkennah appears to consist of thousands of palm trees springing directly from the sea. Tides and floods threaten to wash over the oasis in the wet desert as the encroaching sand dunes threaten to bury the oasis in the dry desert. The islands are so flat and close to sea level that people living on the northern shore sometimes find fish in their gardens after a stormy night.

Close to one third of the islands' 150 square kilometers consist of red clay salt flats that are flooded during the winter. These salt flats or "sebkhas" as they are called locally, are useless except for yielding small quantities of rushes which can be used for

camel fodder, and the recognized possibility of salt farming which is currently an unexploited resource. (Salt farming was abandoned in 1930 and has not been taken up again.) The remaining two thirds of the islands' area is a mixture of two kinds of terrain. About 15 square kilometers or 10 percent of the islands' total area, has a thin calcareous soil on top of a bed of red clay which descends to the shallow water table, one to seven meters deep. (Despois 1937:17). This land can support only the most vigilantly cultivated kitchen gardens of tomatoes, onions, carrots, and legumes and slightly more ambitious orchards of fig trees, grape vines, olive trees, pomegranate and a very occasional citrus or almond tree. The remaining terrain, which accounts for more than half of the islands' area, is covered by a single layer of rocky sandy soil which often has a sandy crust. Where the water table is more than a meter and a half deep, some cereals can be grown, although often a foot must be allowed between single stalks of grain. The shallower and therefore saltier sand is devoted to palm arboriculture and some pasturage. This land is also "farmed" for its rocks which are collected for construction. The limestone is baked in large kilns to make lime for cement. The saltiness of these building materials has serious consequences for the longevity of buildings and walls on Kerkennah. Patches of these three different kinds of land, salt flats, limey soil and sand,

are distributed evenly over the islands.

The control and the distribution of the limited water supply on Kerkennah is one of the essential constraining facts of life on Kerkennah. Water management entails the collecting of water in cisterns, the digging of wells, the transportation of water in pipes and containers, the assignment of the tasks involved, and the allocation of rights to its use. It also entails the allocation of arable land and the tending of this land so as to get the maximum benefit from the available moisture.

The distinctive features of both land and water use on Kerkennah are the minute parcelling of access and the intensiveness of their exploitation. Water management and its related problems have an organizing as well as a constraining effect upon the socio-economic system. The water management system does not merely influence the physical arrangement of things on the ground such as settlement and land use patterns. It also has an impact on social relations in terms of labor organization, marriage strategies, and kinship networks. Institutionally, it is a prominent feature in property rights and the legal system.

Rain water is Kerkennah's salvation. Without the average 200 milliliters per year that Kerkennah receives, the islands would be uninhabitable. Collected in cisterns since Roman times, it is the only source of water for human consumption. Except in extraordinarily

cold or rainy years, there is always some kind of potable water crisis towards the end of the summer in the more densely populated villages. At that time, the private and public cisterns run low yet the demand is the greatest because of the hot weather and the large numbers of summer visitors. Most households have private cisterns but these are often very small and over-used. There are also several large municipal cisterns, the first of which was built in 1939. Cisterns are attached to all of the major maraboutic shrines. The use of these communal stores of water are self-regulated by vigilant public opinion. Families are expected to use their own resources first, not to hoard, to be economical and creative in the recycling of water, to show some loyalty to the shrine they take water from, and to stick to their own neighborhood municipal resources. Violation of these voluntary "rules" would result in gradual isolation from other cooperative systems that make village life possible.

Non-potable water is available from wells and recently installed pumps which tap the shallow and salty water table. There is only one well in the entire archipelago which draws marginally drinkable water, and that is quite distant from any significant settlement. Well water is used for watering plants and animals and for human emergencies. Unforunately, it is also used for mixing cement which causes buildings to crumble sooner

than they should. Because this water is of limited value, there is not much competition over its use.

Public water taps have slowly been installed in the villages by the National Water Utility. It is now also possible for people to have private taps installed directly in their homes. However, the initial expense is great (up to 300TD or 750$US) and the idea of paying a monthly bill for something which Allah gave to mankind seems, if not criminal, at least corrupt. So a tap bringing non-potable water to the house is not normally a high priority on the family budget. A television would certainly come first. Another reason people avoid this utility is that it is contolled entirely by the regional office of the water utility in Sfax. Kerkennis are reluctant to submit any area of their daily lives to an anonymous and distant bureaucracy.

The Kerkennis speak of a potential third source of water that would in their hopeful opinion, "revolutionize" the island economy. The "ifs" involved are: **if** the drilling company that is probing for pockets of natural gas found a sufficient source off Kerkennah's southeast shore, and **if** the Tunisian government commissioned an underwater pipeline to transport the gas to the mainland coast, **then** there would be very little additional expense in laying another pipe next to it to pump potable water from the mainland to Kerkennah. This plan would allow for extensive agricultural development

through irrigation and the installation of a fish processing and canning plant would allow the Kerkennis to benefit more directly from their fishing industry. This is one of a number of development ideas, such as building an airstrip to improve the tourist industry, that remains a pipe dream. So the Kerkennis continue to husband their resources and perform remarkable economies with their limited water supply, as they have done for centuries.

Land use is very much a part of the water management system. Even though the soil is basically very poor, the scarcity of water is even more limiting of agriculture. The availability of moisture in every and any form determines what, if anything, can be grown. The quality of the soil varies with the depth of the water table. The distribution of rural wells determines whether fruit trees which must be hand watered can be grown. The distance between seedlings is decided by the relative dryness of the earth. Kerkennis talk of "watering their trees with their plows". In other words, they aerate the soil around their trees to allow the marine moisture in the air to be absorbed, as they have no other means of refreshing the soil. Other farming methods are all adapted to manage with as little water as possible. Any description of land use is also a description of water use.

Agriculture on Kerkennah is extremely labor intensive for a very low, but highly cherished yield. A family

might plant one sack of grain for every four that they harvest. They hand pick the grain stalk by stalk instead of using a scythe, even though scythes are available. The reason for this is that the scythes knock the heads off some of the stalks which is wasteful and they leave the roots in the ground which the Kerkennis use for animal fodder.

This intensive use of all resources is typical of life on Kerkennah, as it would be of a real desert oasis. When a particular resource is exhausted serving one purpose, it is recycled and adapted to serve another purpose. The use of the palm tree is the best illustration of this. It is the most plentiful resource of the islands. As a building material, people get beams and roofing from the palms. Fish traps and fisheries ranging up to 500 meters in length require eight different parts of the palm tree to manufacture. The household uses parts of the palm tree for making octopus beaters, brooms, scrubbers, strainers, mats, furniture, shoe soles, hats, umbrellas, fans and baskets. Dates are eaten fresh, dried in the sun, and cooked into preserves. The eau de vie of dates is used as an astringent, a medicine for stomach ailments, and an unguent for sores. Date pits are boiled and softened for camel and sheep feed. The young palm leaves are often eaten as a salad and the marrow is treated as a root vegetable. The fresh, sweet seeds are eaten like candy by children. The

flowers and pollen are allegedly used as an aphrodisiac. The sap of the older trees is collected as both a sweet and fermented beverage. When people are ready to replace their fish traps and fishery fences (once a year), they make animal huts and garden fences out of the old pieces. When these pieces are finally beyond this use, they are burned for cooking fuel. Larger leftover bits of palm wood are systematically converted into charcoal. In addition to water, everything that grows on the islands and is found in the sea is considered a free gift from God, to be honored and not wasted.

It is characteristic of oasis agriculture that the arable land be minutely parcelled. This is true in an extreme degree on Kerkennah. It is not at all uncommon for a field of grain to measure less than 50 square meters; in other words, the area of a large room. Nearly every household owns some land, but it would not normally be in one place. This came about through the practice of dividing up the different qualities of land separately. So a man with five sons would divide up his best land into five pieces, his mediocre land into five pieces, and his poor land into five pieces. In one generation three plots have been shattered into fifteen. It is very difficult to learn how many hectares someone owns, because people talk about how many pieces they have, not how much meterage.

Determining peoples' holdings is further complicated

by the fact that the palm and fruit trees on these lands are also divided up separately. So it is possible for there to be no coincidence between someone's land and their trees. Wells are inherited in the same way that trees are. Often a well will be owned by someone different from the one who owns the land. Obviously, as this splintering of property progresses geometrically over the generations, the potential for disputes is great. While the most agriculturally efficient policy would be for brothers and cousins to try to share the benefits of the patrimony intact, when there is any uneasiness over rights, the most socially efficient solution is to split up the property. This, of course, is the trend, but at a certain point, the property is no longer large enough to be divisible. It is not unusual for a group of seven or eight cousins to all have rights in a single olive tree. During the olive harvest one can see the brightly dressed female representatives of all of these cousins up in a single tree attending to their shares of the fruit. In this case, cooperation and competition are two sides of the same operation.

The Our'an prescribes that a woman should inherit one half the share of her brother. "Allah commands you concerning your children as follows: the share of the male is as much as the share of two females...(4:12)" In spite of this ancient guarantee, most women do not claim even this unequal portion of the

patrimony. The social inertia behind the traditional principle of passing the property strictly through the male line is very strong. A woman making a just claim would be tantamount to creating a property dispute and few women in this rural circumstance are motivated or equipped to face the inevitable negative repercussions within her daily sphere. Even the Tunisian Code of Personal Status of 1957, renowned in the Arab world for its progressiveness, has failed to alter this pattern very much. The Code reinforces the Our'anic principle of half shares for daughters, although it adjusts the distribution to favor the nuclear family over the extended family. (Salem 1984:153). Women's rights to inheritance were also enhanced by the dissolution after national independence of family trusts (waqf) which were partially designed to limit women's inheritance. However, neither the Our'anic guarantee nor the modern reforms have essentially changed the picture on Kerkennah and property continues to be controlled almost entirely by men.

The unravelling of the land tenure system is further complicated by the fact that modern land contracts using a uniform and reliable system of measuring and recording were only introduced on Kerkennah in 1975. These new contracts and records are only made now when there is a change of ownership or a dispute that must be settled. The new exactitude of this system

proliferates disputes as it draws people's attention to much finer distinctions between properties. There is considerable reluctance to participate in this modern innovation because the municipality puts a tax on each land transaction. Consequently, many families which have, in fact, divided up their patrimony, present a united front as far as the officialdom is concerned. In the long run, this modern system with its new tax may thus have the paradoxical effect of counteracting the extreme parcelling of property. Another source of reluctance is that the centralized nature of the new system of contracts takes yet another matter out of the hands of the village community. This contributes to a growing sense of local impotence in the face of the national bureaucracy which people naturally resist.

The traditional system of accounting for land ownership was established by the Ottoman bureaucracy in the seventeenth century at which time the Kerkenni population expanded through immigration from the mainland and people began to live in villages and to practice more extensive agriculture. At this time land contracts were written by a local notary to document the change of ownership. The contract would describe the piece of property and name the former and new owners and the terms of the sale or exchange. These contracts were strictly for the use of the individuals involved and no permanent public record was made. This was the system until 1975.

The descriptions in these contracts are rich documents because they use geological, historical and sociological markers to specify the piece of land in question. For example, a description might read, "the parcel of land in the thalathin measuring 40 paces by 50 paces, the northeast corner of which is marked by the palm tree with the twenty trunks and which is bordered on the south side by the footpath to Cherqui, on the west by the land of Hajj Mohammed El Gala and on the north and east by the land of Mansour bin Rahbah bin Salah bin Sliman."

Decoded, the thalathin, which means the thirty, refers to a field where legend has it that thirty men died in a battle against the Sicilians. The palm tree with twenty trunks makes a memorable, albeit impermanent, landmark because palm trees normally grow in clusters of no more than twelve trunks. The Mohammed mentioned is distinguished from the hundreds of others on Kerkennah by the fact that he has been on the hajj of pilgrimage to Mecca and by his nickname, El Gala, which refers to his "foreign", that is extra-Kerkennah, manner of speaking with a "ga" instead of a "qa." The sliver of genealogy accompanying the name of Mansour locates him on the social map fairly clearly.

There are two features of this complicated system that are of particular interest. One is that the contacts are written in what could be called a social

code that depends on a commonly held body of community knowledge. They are absolutely indecipherable without this very special and very local knowledge. The other is that although Mohammed, Mansour and the palm tree will all die, the community memory of these markers will persist and allow this description of the land to continue to be effective.

The submarine plateaus, of which Kerkennah itself is a shallow outcropping, are treated and conceptualized very much like land by the Kerkennis who exploit them. These "lands" have big holes and cracks in them that are called lakes (bahira) and rivers (wad). (See map p.28). These fissures are navigationally important and are known by proper nouns such as the River Mimoun, the River Saadoun and Gremdi Lake. The wet desert "lands" are also known by proper nouns. They are owned, rented and exploited much like dry land. They are often named and described in the same ownership contracts and in the same terms as dry agricultural lands. They are subject to the same kinds of disputes. There are well-known paths on these banks that can be travelled largely on foot.

"Hunting and gathering" are the main activities that take place on these shallow banks. Women,who gather useful bits and pieces such as cuttlefish bones on shore, do the same thing in the shallows, often as part of the same operation. The main products of hand gathering are squid and octopus, various sorts of molluscs and small

crustaceans. In some of these cases, it might be more appropriate to say foot gathering because the female scavenger wades along with her eyes focused on the sandy bottom four or five feet ahead. When her finely trained eye sees some significant bubble or track, she digs her big toe into the sand and usually comes up with a little shellfish clutched between her toes. The women collect algae which is used as camel fodder. Dried algae is also used as an intermediate roofing material. Useful bits of refuse that occasionally turn up such as plastic bottles are also collected. For this kind of gathering the scavenger can go where she likes. The use of traps for squid and octopus is more restricted. The traps are cylinders with a deep hole in one end. Sometimes discarded coffee cans are used in this way. More durable traps are made by pushing a soda bottle into a mold full of wet cement. These traps are usually placed in otherwise unclaimed or unexploited locations and a first come, first served principle is observed. The law of the wet desert is to give a wide berth to other peoples' apparatus even at this minor level.

Fishing is called "hunting of fish" (stad el hut). Fixed fisheries (sharfiyya) made up of configurations of lashed palm fences with traps (drina) at strategic intersections is the traditional mode of fishing for which Kerkennah is famous. The effective positioning of these fisheries depends on a highly specialized knowledge

of the submarine geography, currents, tides and water temperature patterns. (André Louis' study of Kerkennah material culture [1963] contains a painstaking account of Kerkennah fishing technology). The fish are forced to swim along these zigzagging fences until they are led into a small enclosure called a "room" (beit). The only way out is into one of the traps placed in the corners of the "room." Different types of mullet and sea bass are commonly caught.

It is noteworthy that the economy of the wet desert is totally dependent on the characteristic symbol of the oasis: the palm tree. No aspect of this technology would be possible without access to multiudes of palm trees. A typical fishery of this sort has five to seven hundred meters of palm fences. These fences are made of stripped, quartered palm branches spaced at fifteen to twenty centimeters, lashed together with locally made halfa rope. Every two meters there is a sharpened post that is pounded into the bank, holding the fence in place. The traps are woven out of a more flexible part of the palm frond and a thin strand of this same halfa grass rope. All of this equipment must be replaced every year, usually in August, and normally it is all manufactured by hand by the fisherman who holds the rights to the fishery site.

There are three legal forms of access to these fishery sites. The first is personal property. There are

some sites that have been in the hands of one patrilineal group (`arsh) for over two hundred years. They first became personal property the way early land tenure was established, by right of occupation. It is often the case that a large fishery site is owned collectively by a group of patrilineally related households. The wet desert cannot be broken down into minute parcels the way agricultural land can. In these cases, one of the households will operate and maintain the fishery and the other households will take shares of the catch at regular or rotating intervals.

If disputes arise or none of the families wants to run the fishery, the rights to the site can be rented out. This is the second form of access. The rent can either be paid annually in cash or more frequently in the form of fresh fish. The third form of access is through the collective ownership of the sheikhats or village districts of which there are eight on Kerkennah. These rights are auctioned off to the highest bidder every summer. This system came about in 1772, when Bey Ali Ben Hasseine, in an attempt to hinder the encroachment of Sfaxian fishermen on Kerkennah, confiscated the two large banks that the Sfaxians had been buying up and returned them to the Kerkennis for the benefit of the poor. Up to this day, each of these two banks is divided into quarters. The sheikhats in pairs are assigned to the exploitation of one of these quarters. The paired

sheikhats rotate on an annual basis within their quarter so that neither sheikhat will have a permanent advantage from a superior site. Inhabitants can only bid for sites that their particular sheikhat controls. The profits from the annual auctions are either distributed to the poor by the local religious leaders or used for the good of the village such as the repair of the mosque.

Traditional Kerkenni maritime activities are not confined to fixed fisheries or to the shallow banks. On foot, fishing is also done by harpoon, casting net and floating screens. Historically, sponge fishing has been an important resource for the three northernmost villages on El Cherqui. The Kerkennis learned trawling techniques from the Maltese and Italians who dominated sponge fishing in the Mediterranean before World War Two. This technique is now banned in the waters of the Gulf of Gabes and all sponge fishing is done by pronged spears and harpoons. The Kerkennis have never been sponge divers like the Greeks and, in fact, many fishermen do not know how to swim.

In the deeper waters, fishing is mostly by mobile nets moved about by boat. The typical local fishing boat is a fluka, a small sailboat made of olive wood, a style found up and down the Tunisian coast. There is also a larger, exclusively Kerkenni designed boat built in the village of Djouaber called a lud which is noted for its flat bottom, its mast set at 23 degrees, and its

rectangular sail.

Other than this special style of boat building, Kerkenni crafts consist mainly of various forms of rope-making, weaving, and basketry including all the ropes, nets, traps,etc. needed for fishing. Raw halfa grass is imported from Gabes, then washed, beaten and twisted into rope which can then be used in a multitude of local purposes or sold in Sfax by the length or woven sacks for carrying charcoal. Wool from local sheep is spun and woven into blankets, rugs,and clothing. Formerly sails were woven out of wool for want of any lighter material, making them quite dangerous when wet. Palm fronds are woven into hats, baskets, brooms, traps and fences. These crafts are produced by skills that most adults would have, taking into account certain sex-specific specialties. So most families on Kerkennah are self-sufficient in these basic items.

It is also true in general that in terms of exploiting the natural resources of this oasis in the sea, most families can achieve a basic subsistence using the indigenous technologies and specialist knowledge of the natural environment discussed above. It is only within the last twenty to thirty years that people on Kerkennah have begun to expect anything more than subsistence. The social organization of this level of the economy, which is still completely active will be discussed in the next section.

## THE DOUBLE ECONOMY

It can be argued that contemporary Kerkennah has a double economy: a traditional economy and a modernizing economy. The two economies are different in their social organizations, their activities and goals. They are also different in their evaluation of what makes economic "sense." As mentioned above, the traditional economy is geared toward the subsistence of the household and it is organized almost entirely within the social world of the village. The modernizing economy links the islands to the mainland through labor migration and the capital that returns to the islands is the basis for new enterprises not necessarily confined to the world of the village. It cannot be argued that these two spheres are autonomous of each other because in a paradoxical way, the traditional economy is "subsidized" by the modernizing economy. What is meant by this is that the remittances from migrant labor allow enough of the population to stay behind and continue to pursue farming and fishing in the tremendously labor intensive way that conditions on Kerkennah require. The paradox is that rapid developments in the modernizing economy have made it possible for the social organization of the traditional economy to be maintained and for the two economies to run in parallel.

## The Traditional Economy

The most important social organizational feature of the traditional economy is the clear sexual division of labor. The essential division is that the men fish and the women farm. This configuration is by no means unique to Kerkennah, but it still tells us a great deal about how this traditional community operates. Although the sea and the land are clearly divided domains in terms of the organization of labor, men have rights in the heritable property, capital equipment, and the produce of both domains. Although theoretically women could make a claim on heritable property which would be backed by religious or secular law in different proportions, the strong agnatic principle which dominates all traditional Arab societies makes this possibility virtually irrelevant. The preferred marriage is with the partilineal parallel cousin. This has the combined benefits for the traditional system of keeping the property relatively intact within the agnatic group, minimizing disputes, and not least, having a claim on the female relative's labor for the longest possible period (both before and after marriage.) Women can only protect their economic interests by cooperating in the sense of marrying "close" and committing their hard labor to the maximum exploitation of the property to which they are affinally assigned but not attached.

The apparently even division of labor between fishing and farming is somewhat misleading because while men see themselves as fishermen and most of what they do is related to this activity, women do not see themselves as farmers and agricultural tasks comprise only part of the vast spectrum of productive tasks they perform. Nevertheless, women are still carrying nearly the full burden of this part of the economy. Hence, women work harder and longer at more tasks with less acknowledgement of their contribution than men.

Men participate in the agricultural process usually only at the level where there is an important piece of capital equipment involved such as a mule used for plowing or turning an olive press, or if a financial transaction is involved, such as the selling of a sheep or goat. Sophie Ferchiou has reported interestingly on this kind of division of labor and hierarchy of tasks in her study of female agriculturalists in the Tunisian interior region of Sidi Bou-Zid. She also found that women worked more zealously at a vaster range of tasks, but that the control of agricultural equipment and property by men caused the women's manual labor to be devalued and not properly taken into account in development schemes (Ferchiou:1985). Vanessa Maher (1974:115) comes to a similar conclusion about the sexual division of agricultural labor in the Middle Atlas of Morocco.

Attitudes toward different kinds of work, work identities (eg. fishing vs. "what women do"), and the products of work are important to understand as part of the Kerkenni ideology as well as for their implications for sexual politics in the Arab world.

Men and women share a work ideology on Kerkennah, but in actual practice women come closer to preserving this traditional ideal. This is an unalienated, cooperative approach to productive activity. People identify and are integrated with their work in a number of ways. First of all, because the product of most labor is for the direct consumption of the family, the process of production and consumption is an unbroken cycle. The distance between the effort and the reward is very short, even though the effort may be very great and the reward very small. Because people are working for themselves, they do not think of their labor and the hours spent as a "cost." They are one's own and in this sense, they are "free."

The focus is on the results of the whole process or the whole product not on the minute tasks or the amount of work involved. Usually the worker is engaged in every stage of the productive process, is intimately aware of the use to which the product will be put, and in nine times out of ten, will be consuming it himself. Even when people are paid for their work, they are usually paid by the product (completed sail or rug or kilos of rope) rather than by the time spent doing the job.

Again, the relationship of the producer to the product is preserved. The worker concentrates on the product not the alienated unit of labor. The value is still directly related to the activity.

Part of this island ideology is a disdain and distrust of money and "people who love money." The ideal (and the fantasy version of the past) is for people to share, cooperate and be satisfied with "enough." Money, although necessary, is thought to be alienating, divisive, corrupting and "non-Kerkenni." Finally, there is a value placed on people being the same: doing the same kind of work, eating the same things and reaping the same scale of reward. This is part of the "kif-kif" egalitarianism of Kerkennah. Most of the features of this work ideology still actually characterize women's labor on Kerkennah. The principles are recognized and honored by men, but as their activities become more dinar and hour oriented, they become more of an image of how things should or used to be. This account of traditional Kerkenni attitudes toward work identifies some of the hidden meaning and satisfaction that helps compensate people in their extremely demanding work lives.

There is a scale of honor associated with different kinds of work based on this ideology and the principle of keeping one's labor as closely tied to the family property as possible, patrilineally and affinally, for men and women respectively. Working on one's own

property is totally honorable and unquestioned. One's honor increases with the number of people who can be called in to help with big seasonal tasks such as the grain harvest. The recruited worker's honor is more or less vulnerable depending on the terms of recruitment. For a woman, working on her in-laws' land for a major portion of the crop is reasonable and considered intelligent because it reminds everyone of her husband's active claim on the land. She has not endangered her husband's inheritance by letting the interest lapse. If she lives in Sfax, it shows the island in-laws that she is not "too good" to work on the land, thereby actually increasing her honor.

Taking turns working on each other's land until the harvest is finished is acceptable and neutral in terms of honor. It is certainly better than working alone in the fields which is more or less impossible both in terms of the task and social propriety and definitely more entertaining. Work exchange parties (ma`una) are the most common format for major agricultural tasks mostly undertaken by women.

Working by the day on an unrelated or distantly related person's land for an exact amount of the crop is considered pathetic and mitigated only by the closeness of the kin tie. But it is still humiliating that the kin tie is not strong enough to raise the crop picker out of the category of "doing someone else's work" into the

honorable category of "doing our work." Being paid in measures of grain per day of labor contains a mixed message about a woman's work honor. On the one hand, the work itself is proper for women and is identical to the work being done side by side by the landowners themselves. It is also honorable for the woman not to work for money, but to bring the fruits of her labors directly to the family's table which is also what the landowners are doing. On the other hand, the breaking of her labor into pieces of time is alienating and the actual compensation for each piece of time is so meager (about four liters of unhusked grain a day, having a cash equivalent of about 400 millimes), that the final "honor quotient" for this kind of work is very low.

For men, however, working on other people's land for a daily wage is considered a "profession" if capital equipment such as a mule, a camel, or a tractor (there are three on Kerkennah) is involved, and is thus honorable. The control of the capital equipment and the fact that he is paid in dinars (about 3.500TD a day along with the obligatory tea, midday meal and packet of cigarettes) and not in kind elevates him from being just an agrarian worker without a claim on the land he is working. Because his work is his capital equipment, he still has the honor of doing "his own work" and not someone else's. And because he is paid in cash, he is not a peasant (fellah), a lowly and somewhat alien

mainland identity in the eyes of Kerkenni men. Kerkenni men might do some farming, but they are not farmers; yet while some might rarely fish, they are all fishermen.

An account of the social organization of each of the major economic activities shows how the patrilineal extended family functions as the critical unit of the traditional economy and how the Kerkenni work ideology supports the coherence of this unit. There are five major categories of activity in the traditional economy, each of which has its own cycle of tasks, natural schedule and social organization: fishing, palm arboriculture, olive arboriculture, cereal agriculture, and animal husbandry. There is also a sixth, slightly anomalous, category which is the small sphere of traditional commerce.

## Fishing

There are six specific economic roles involved in fishing: boat owner, crewman, licensee to sharfiyya site, netowner, netman, and equipment craftsman. Each role has a set of skills and a financial status associated with it, although roles might overlap in a single individual.

A fluka costs between 300 and 500 dinars, making it the biggest piece of capital in most families. The larger luds cost at least 500 dinars. A boat is sometimes jointly owned by two brothers or cousins. More than two owners is very rare and the joint owners are

usually of the same generation and age group. I know of no example of joint ownership of boats or equipment between unrelated villagers.

Regular crewmen and netmen are normally closely related to the boatowner and are often a generation younger. The crew changes composition to include school age boys and mainland relatives during the summer months. It is common for a young man to work on his uncle's fishing crew for a year or two until he can buy a boat or a share of a boat or until a more lucrative form of employment presents itself. Another common combination is a father and son team in which case, the son gradually takes over the entire operation. In the larger fishing ports of El Attaya and Melitta, there are several fishermen who own small fleets of four or five boats. In these cases, they turn over the operation to a mature relative who directs the work and has complete authority while the boat is at sea. The daily intake of fish is divided in the following manner: two parts for the skipper (<u>ra'is</u>) whether he is the owner or not, one part for the boat, one part for the nets, one part for each of the crew members. The catch is usually small enough so that a great effort is made to keep it in one household.

A minimum of two men is required for offshore net fishing. This form of fishing was introduced more recently than <u>sharfiyya</u> fishing and is thought to be more enjoyable and less work. Visiting relatives will often

join the crew for fun, while they would not help with the sharfiyya fishing which is thought to be tedious work more for old men than for young.

Sharfiyya fishing is usually pursued by a single fisherman in his fluka. If he cannot make his daily collection, the fisherman who holds rights to the neighboring "plot" will empty the traps and deliver the fish to the absent fisherman's household. This favor is repaid with a reciprocal favor on another occasion.

The annual replacement of the fishery fences and traps is considered one of the most difficult of male chores. The ideal work team for the planting of the new fences is a fisherman and two or three grown sons because there is no need for compensation. If a fisherman lacks available sons, he and one or two fishermen who exploit nearby areas and are in the same predicament will exchange services. This task is measured not in terms of hours but rather as a single task to be completed. For this reason, it is considered better to depend on those whose labor the fisherman can freely draw without concern for compensation or reciprocity.

The sharfiyya licensee and boat owner usually prepares his own equipment, although he may purchase some of the raw materials from a related or unrelated neighbor. Reportedly in the "past" (generically, this usually means pre-Independence), this transaction was a trade-in-kind. If purchased, the palm branches required

for the manufacture of a typical 500 meter sharfiyya, would cost about 120 dinars. This is a good example of the traditional economy being viable only so long as the fisherman is able to depend on his own "free" labor and raw materials. The weaving of traps and nets is often done in the company of other men similarly occupied and is considered a pleasant social occasion at which much tea is drunk. Great pride is taken in the quality of the equipment crafted, so there is an element of showmanship involved in the public setting for these tasks. Although there are not many "retired" fishermen, the preparing of fishing equipment by disabled or decrepit villagers is not uncommon. These men either donate this labor to the household they live in, trade the equipment for fish from one of the able fishermen, or sell the equipment for cash. A drina which takes up to a week to make, sells for three dinars. This activity allows these old men to continue to contribute economically to their households and to participate in one of the chief subjects of male conversation: fishing.

## Palm Arboriculture

Everybody has palms, so the labor associated with them tends to be confined to the household group which might typically include:

A - male head of household and tree owner
B - A's wife
C - son/s of A and B

D - wife/wives of C
E - unmarried daughter/s of A and B

In terms of the sexual division of labor, palm agriculture is an ambiguous case because half of the products of the palm are used for the traditional fishing technology and half are used for a variety of domestic purposes. The products of the palm tree that have to do with fishing are harvested largely by A and C especially if they are fishing partners. If there are no sons in the household, B will help A cut and transport the fronds. In the worst case, an unrelated owner of a cart with a mule or camel will be paid to transport a large supply of palm fronds to the sharfiyya site.

The products of the palm tree that have to do with food and food preparation are taken care of by women. B would keep track of what needs to be done and often assign D and E to the tasks. In this situation, D has authority over E because D's economic interests and identity are now permanently aligned with A's household and E's commitment is only temporary. Also D would usually be older than E and married women in general have more influence and authority than unmarried women.

The labor associated with palm wine, lagmi, falls exclusively on A, the owner of the tree. This is because of the economic and social value of the wine ("he who has lagmi has company"), and because of its slightly dangerous and "forbidden" character. Lagmi is an

important tool (or weapon!) in the male social domain, so the power of distribution is carefully protected. The theological danger of drinking palm wine is dealt with by the argument that because it ferments naturally on the tree, it is not really forbidden. Lagmi is also ambiguous because the "morning" lagmi is sweet and for women, while the "evening" lagmi has fermented and is for men.

Unambiguously, both men and women fertilize the date palms in the spring by introducing the seeds into the flowers of the palm.

## Olive Arboriculture

The cast of characters is a little broader for olive agriculture than it is for palm agriculture because of the greater value and scarcity of olive trees. They are important because olive oil is very expensive if purchased and it plays a major role in Tunisian diet and cuisine as well as traditional medicine.

A - male head of household and tree or share owner
B - wife of A
C - son/s of A and B
D - wife/wives of C living in A's household
E - unmarried daughter/s of A and B
F - wives of sons of A and B living in separate households
G - related and neighboring wives of nearby tree owners
H - male owner of large olive mill
I - wife of H

B is the boss. If the trees are owned jointly by

brothers or cousins, the wife of the largest share owner is the boss. If the shares are equal, the most senior wife is boss. If the most senior wife is very elderly, a more vigorous but still mature wife in the class of A will direct the labor. These women do the harvesting of the olives together. They share the fruits before they are processed, unlike the grain harvest. The harvesting of less valuable fruit trees, such as pomegranate or fig trees, is often done singly by the wife of one of the joint owners. In this case, this wife gets the largest share even if her husband's right to the tree is equal to the others. With women living in separate households, it is unusual for them to have joint interests in any trees other than olive trees.

B, D and E all live in the same household. They share equally in the work and benefit jointly in the produce. Their shares might be measured and counted separately, but it is then processed in one lot and consumed communally.

Men are rarely involved in arboriculture. If the family of A had direct access to a plow and a plow animal, C might aerate the soil around the citrus and olive trees. This would as likely be done by B herself. If the land under the trees is owned and being farmed by someone other than A's immediate household, the aerating with a plow might be done by the wife or son of the landowner in the process of their own agricultural

program. In this case, a small amount of the produce from the trees would be given to the landowner's household. This contribution would be generous and not carefully calculated because the landowner and the tree owner are certain to be at least cousins and the coexistence of their property interests means that they must be on good terms and in a system of long term reciprocity in other areas.

If there were not enough labor available in A's immediate household, F would help harvest and process the olives. They would be compensated with a share of the harvest adjusted for the amount of labor contributed and their husband's patrimonial claim on the trees.

If B and G are already in a system of long term reciprocity, they might exchange labor on each other's trees at harvest time. This is an exchange of labor and not of produce. The advantages of this procedure is that the labor then becomes something of a social occasion away from home and claims on the harvest of an unfixed sort are reduced or eliminated. This is a less tense relationship than if women of different households shared both the labor and the produce. There is less room for dispute. Because of the intimate kinship relationship between B, D and F, disagreement about the division of labor, property, and produce would tend to be submerged and to have generalized and long term repercussions. So the preferred system is for all the labor and produce to

be shared within a single household or for labor alone to be shared between households. Also, the quality and quantity of the harvest are an object of family pride. People prefer this achievement to be undiluted so they can use the produce as a tool of hospitality and social alignment.

Each village has at least one large olive mill. H is paid 200 millimes for each bushel of olives crushed by his mill stone which is pushed by his camel, donkey or mule. The running of the mill is organized by I. She is in the position to lower or excuse a payment and to give priority access to the mill to her "favorites." All of the women waiting to use the mill help the woman whose olives are being ground at the time for sociability and to speed up the process, a common instance of free cooperative work among women.

People demonstrate their local alliances according to the capital equipment they patronize. Shifts in allegiances within the village are never interpreted lightly. Transferring one's patronage outside the village is unthinkable even when one's village only has a hand pushed press and the next village has several mule driven presses. This is the case with Kellabine and its neighbor, Remla, with five animal driven presses. Controlling an olive press or grain mill is very desirable not only because of the income it produces, but also because of the social power associated with it. The

ability to attract people to one's household is a measure of the family's stature. The public message is, "They come to me, I don't go to them." Having an olive mill in the middle of the household compound insures that this message will be heeded. (Nadia Abu Zahra has developed a very rich account of the importance of being able to attract visitors in her study of the Sahelian village, Sidi Ameur [Abu Zahra:1982].)

## Cereal Agriculture

The social organization of cereal agriculture is similar to olive arboriculture. The difference lies in the greater variety of tasks involved throughout the agricultural cycle. These include plowing, sowing, harvesting, threshing , grinding the grain and then a number of different procedures for processing the cereals into edible forms. This work is also characterized by more communal exchanges of labor among women.

A - male head of household and major land owner
B - wife of A
C - son/s of A and B
D - wife/wives of C living in A's household
E - unmarried daughter/s of A and B
F - wives of sons of A and B living in separate households and on the mainland
G - related and neighboring wives of nearby landowners
H - male owner of large mill, plow animals, tractor, thresher or other necessary agricultural equipment
I - wife of H

Once again B is the boss. She decides on the work schedule and organizes the labor. She also does more work than anybody else because she is involved in all of

the processes all year around. B or D plow the land in November after the olive harvest. This is solitary work with a camel and a single bladed plow. E would not do this work or anything else that would take her alone to the fields. B and/or D also sow the fields using up to 1/4 of the last year's harvest as seed.

The harvesting and threshing of the grain are the great labor intensive ventures of the agricultural cycle. As discussed above, the labor is performed as much as possible by B,D,E and expanding out to include F. Once their own harvest is completed, women in category G help each other finish the harvest. Women in this category would be more likely to get involved than A or C or other closely related males, although this does happen, too.

Harvesting and threshing are so labor intensive that most households do not have enough female labor available to it to accomplish the tasks independently. A common scenario is for groups of women in category G to go from field to field harvesting each woman's cereals cooperatively until all the fields have been done. They then transport the harvest to the salt flats, sebkah, on the edge of the village near the shore and thresh and winnow each separate harvest in the same round robin. This whole cycle is about ten days of concentrated labor.

The threshing parties on the sebkah are unusual because although most fishing and agricultural tasks occur at the same time, they do not usually occur at the

same place. Everyone threshes and winnows their grain on the sebkah because it is spacious and the ground is hard and clean and the constant breeze from the sea is a great aid to the winnowing process. The atmosphere of cooperation, competition and celebration makes this scene quite intense. The quantity and quality of everyone's harvest is subject to public scrutiny, discussion, and obligatory praise. The festive atmosphere is enhanced by the sharing of food, the delight of children who have the treats of riding the threshing cart round and round like a carousel and eating the fresh green kernals of grain like candy, and the common relief of the job being nearly done. This communal work-festival is very much in the domain of women, although men are by no means excluded.

A and C and possibly other elderly male houshold affiliates might participate in transporting the harvested sheaves from the fields to the sebkah, driving the threshing sled with a camel or a mule, or transporting the grain to the one power driven mill if the harvest was that large. In all of these instances some vehicle or important piece of capital equipment is involved which distinguishes the man's labor from the manual labor of the female fellahah.

## Animal Husbandry

Most households have at least a couple of sheep or goats which are kept for their wool and more

significantly, for the ritual slaughter on the Feast of the Sacrifice (`Id el Kbir), the most important holiday in the Islamic ritual calendar. Even a very poor family would try to keep at least a goat to be able to fulfil this religious obligation. Contemptuous jokes are made about irreligious Sfaxians buying a leg of lamb from the butcher for the `Id el Kbir and calling it a sacrifice (adha). Sheep and goats are also slaughtered for other festal occasions such as weddings and fulfilling vows to local saints. In these ways, animal husbandry is at least as important to the ritual life of the family as it is to the actual economy of the household.

In spite of the ritual importance of sheep and goats, shepherding is the lowliest of all the rural economic roles. This task often falls on someone who is mildly retarded or deformed or is in some other way thought to be pathetic and on the social periphery. A shepherd in the village of El Attaya who had no relatives, which is the worst imaginable form of poverty, is such a pathetic and peripheral figure. Before compulsory primary education was established in 1970, families which could not afford to pay the village shepherd for his service would often keep a daughter out of school to take up this task. In any case, this is a lowly job, the payment for which is thought of by the contributors almost as a charity (zakat).

At dawn every morning, 365 days a year, the shepherd

goes around the village and collects the sheep and goats from the households that have informally contracted his labor and leads this collective flock out of the village to graze. Depending on the agricultural season, this is a more or less difficult job, looking for some stubble to graze or keeping the flock out of the cherished planted fields. At dusk, the flock is brought back to the village and the animals find their ways back home to their huts made out of recycled fish fences. Once home, the animals are looked after by the unmarried girls of the household.

There are three reasons why this job is so unenviable. One is that the work is totally unvarying day after day all year around, unlike other rural economic roles which have a relatively high degree of daily and seasonal variation. Another is that this job is of necessity a daily banishment from the village community in a culture where "May you be with people," (itnassu), is the kindest greeting. Finally, a very skilled and successful shepherd might look after 100 head of sheep at a time. He would be paid 200 millimes a head per month, earning a monthly wage of 20 dinars. This is about a quarter of what a traditonal sharfiyya fisherman might earn from selling his surplus fish.

The sheep are shorn once a year and the wool is cleaned, carded and spun by the more elderly (and expert) women of the household. The yarn might then be sold by

weight in Sfax, but more commonly, it is taken to a professional male weaver in the village or in Sfax to be woven into a blanket for household use.

Sheep or goats are slaughtered and butchered by the male head of the household with a fair amount of ceremony whether the animal is being slaughtered for a religious occasion or not. The sheepskins, which are still the most popular kind of furniture on Kerkennah, are prepared for use by the women of the household. This consists of a long process of scraping and cleaning with sand in the sea.

The processing of sheepskins falls into the category of khidma nnsa, "women's work," which includes the processing of all of the products of the agricultural cycles described above to the point where they are usable or consumable by the household. This means the pitting and drying of dates, the roasting and grinding of grain, the processing of seminola into couscous, the beating and drying of octopus and squid, and dozens of other related activities which make production and consumption part of the same cycle and which largely characterizes the traditional economy.

## The Commercial Outpost

The cycle of production and consumption is not, and has never been, a completely closed circle. The traditional economy does have a small commercial sphere

in the form of the little general stores found in all of the villages. These little shops operate in many ways as outposts or distribution depots for the full market economy of Sfax. Commerce on Kerkennah is an "incomplete market" in the sense that it lacks the complete repertoire of economic roles and functions of a market. It is a distribution satellite of the Sfax market in the sense that the economic drama of selecting the goods and beating the price down is completed in Sfax. On Kerkennah there are no middlemen or wholesalers. All the shops are retail and they stock nearly identical sets of goods. The transportation of goods is the concern of the shopkeepers, the cost of which, they complain, eliminates the prospect of the kind of profit they might have on the mainland. The economic drama is absent in that the shops do not compete, their prices are identical, and there is no bargaining, something striking in an Arab society. Bargaining requires a kind of adversarial cunning that would clash with the kif-kif ideology of village life. There is no trouble taken with display, advertisement, or salesmanship and there is almost no innovation in merchandise. When there is innovation, a new type of plastic sandals for example, all the shops innovate in the same way at the same time.

This uniformity also extends to the demand for goods. There is relatively little income differential among the permanent inhabitants of Kerkennah, and most households

consume the same kinds and quantities of things. In other words, there is a captive, static demand for commercial goods on Kerkennah, new needs arise very slowly. Shopkeepers know exactly what will sell in a period of time and they order exactly that and no more. Even if a merchant could make a significant profit from taking the risk of having a small surplus in anticipation of many summer visitors for instance, he would still be strongly inclined to order just what the ordinary demand has been in the past. The emphasis is on distribution and stability, no risk and no surplus.

Kerkennah is also incompletely marketed because it is a one way market. The Kerkennis consume from the depot, but they do not produce for it. The commercial sphere is concerned almost entirely with products that come from Sfax. Products grown or produced on Kerkennah almost never enter the commercial circuit because there is little to be gained. The family largely produces and consumes what it needs with little surplus. As with water, the cultural ideal is to store or consume what you need and to give the rest away to those who are closest or neediest. There is a fair amount of barter within the village which also preserves the anti-commercial village ideal. Commerce is associated with Sfax where people are criticized for "loving money" (yhibbu el fluss) at the expense of all other values. Commerce among neighbors who used to trade or share is considered

socially alienating. Minor irregular commerce among neighbors is confined to eggs, charcoal or items in short supply from the mainland such as henna. The tone of these transactions is as if the seller had done a shopping errand for the buyer.

Families tend to patronize only one local shop, the choice being made by family ties first and then by village quarter. Loyalty to a single shop is rewarded with automatic long-term credit. Accounts are kept casually on brown wrapping paper and are collected on a monthly basis. Government franchises for the selling of tobacco and regulation school supplies rotate among the different shops and this is one reason why families might transfer their patronage.

The shops are usually run by elderly male villagers. There are no female shopkeepers. Although the shopkeepers are distinguished by their facility with numbers and all manner of learning is respected, being a shopkeeper is not a greatly esteemed career. Once again, in the world of the village, the real work of men is fishing.

Although these shops are open most of the time, they are a little bit like rural periodic markets on the mainland because deliveries of the most desired fresh goods are made at most once a week. When the rush is over, the shopkeeper occupies himself the way all village men `at ease' do: he makes rope, fish traps, nets or

baskets; or plays cards and drinks tea with his friends. The fact of commerce is submerged in the other activities of village life, just as "deals" between neighbors are submerged in the idiom of sharing and reciprocity.

## The Subsistence Ethic

James Scott in his book about peasant rebellions in Southeast Asia, The Moral Economy of the Peasant, gives an extraordinarily lucid account of what a subsistence economy is from the point of view of the peasant and how he sees the choices available to him. Scott's main point is that what he calls the" subsistence ethic" is risk-averse and geared to minimizing the possibility of a major loss rather than maximizing the possibility of a major gain. It is a "safety-first" economic outlook which is reinforced by many of the social arrangements that characterize a traditional village culture. He argues that patterns of reciprocity, forced generosity, communal land, and work sharing, and even systems of gossip and envy are redistributive mechanisms which promote the achievement of a subsistence standard of living for all members of the community, the right to which is seen as a basic principle of social justice. These features give traditional peasant culture the appearance of being radically and morally egalitarian, when, in fact, these defenses against inequality and autonomy are really practical devices for insuring a minimum standard of living. Discussing the communitarian tradition and village morality in Southeast Asia, Scott elaborates,

"Village redistribution worked unevenly and, even at its best, produced no egalitarian utopia. We may suppose that there was always some tension in the village between the better-off who hoped to minimize their obligations and the poor who had most to gain from communal social guarantees. The poor, for their part, got "a place," not an equal income, and must have suffered a loss of status as a result of their permanent dependence. Nevertheless, this pattern did represent the minimal moral requirements of village mutuality. It worked through the support or acquiescence of most villagers and, above all, in normal times it assured the `survival of the weakest.' What moral solidarity the village possesed as a village was in fact based ultimately on its capacity to protect and feed its inhabitants. So long as village membership was valuable in a pinch, the `little tradition' of village norms and customs would command a broad acceptance. (Scott:1976,43-44)

The traditional economy of Kerkennah and its accompanying work ideology fit Scott's model of a community operating on a subsistence ethic quite closely. The peasant family as both the producing and the consuming unit, the preference for crops that can be eaten rather than sold, labor intensive rather than capital intensive enterprises, the avoidance of risk at the expense of greater gains, and the principle of village mutuality, all typify the traditional economy on Kerkennah.

This model of a subsistence ethic also characterizes many of the interactions of the traditional economy with the modernizing economy. The common choice of fishermen to sell their fish to the National Fisheries Bureau at a low government set price rather than risk the fluctuations of the higher priced independent market is another example of stability-seeking at the expense of

profit even in relation to the cash economy of the mainland. A government subsidy to encourage people to cut down their olive groves and plant apricot trees as a high return cash crop was universally rejected on Kerkennah, an example of the preference for crops that can be eaten rather than sold.

Distribution of risk as a way of minimizing danger is another important characteristic of Scott's model and the Kerkennah economy. One of the ways that families on Kerkennah distribute the risk is to try to establish at least one link with the cash economy of the mainland cities. The cash remittances from this link stabilize the family economy in times of insecurity. Scott wisely stresses that poverty and economic insecurity are not the same thing and that insecure poverty is more painful than poverty alone. To reduce this insecurity, the ideal configuration is for one or more sons to stay on the islands and pursue subsistence activities and look after the family property and for one or more sons to be sent to the mainland to pursue a profession or trade or simply to work for a reliable wage. The link with the modernizing economy does not supplant the subsistence character of the traditional economy. In fact, it supports it by diversifying and therefore, reducing the economic risks that the family faces. Stability is an absolute priority in all subsistence economies and the main impact of these cash remittances from outside on the

traditional economy has been to stabilize and subsidize it rather than transform it. In this respect, Kerkennah is a classic example of something found all over the Third World. Cash remittances are very different from capital investment and herein lies the critical gap between the traditional and modernizing spheres of the economy and the reason why the rate of labor migration from Kerkennah will probably continue to increase.

## Labor Migration

There is a vast social science literature on labor migration in developing countries. Whether written from an economics, urban planning, or anthropological point of view, all of these studies start with the same two questions: who migrates and why? The who question then breaks down into: is it individual random migration or organized specialized migration? If it is individual and random migration, how is it linked to the sending household economy? If it is organized and specialized, is it a serial chain migration or a group movement? In either case, how and by whom is the decision to migrate made? The why question breaks down into: what is the **push** in terms of declining social and economic conditions, pressure on land, unequal distribution of resources, and increasing cash needs in the sending community? What is the **pull** in terms of the real and perceived opportunities and prosperity in the receiving

community? Also, does the **push** and **pull** fluctuate so that migraton is temporary, seasonal, or cyclical or is the force all in the directon of permanent migration? If it is cyclical or permanent, what is the impact on the economy and social structure of the sending community?

Kerkennah is part of a massive phenomonon of rural-urban migration taking place in developing countries all over the world. In 1976 urban population growth was 6 to 7 percent in most African countries and 4 to 6 percent in Asian and Latin American cities compared to 1 percent in New York and London. The world's 12 fastest growing cities are all in developing countries and over 50 percent of this growth is due to the accelerated pace of rural-urban migration rather than natural population increase. (Todaro 1976:7-10). In Tunisia from 1931 to 1966, the urban dwelling population grew from 25 percent to 40 percent. (Seetharam and Mahrous 1973:91-92). By 1984, 50 percent of the population was urban dwelling with 1/6 of the total population living in Tunis and 1/12 living in Sfax. Tunis is growing at 5 percent a year compared to a national growth rate of 2.5 percent and a rural growth rate of 1 percent. (Perkins 1986:6). From 1931 to 1984 the national population has increased from 2.4 million to 7 million, nearly tripling. During that period, the population of Kerkennah has decreased from 15,130 in 1936 to 14,451 in 1986, having hit a low of 12,566 in 1966. Following a global trend, an estimated

30,000 Kerkennis have migrated to the cities with approximately 1/2 in Sfax, 1/4 in Tunis and 1/4 elsewhere in Tunisia and abroad. (Le developpment des Iles Kerkennah 1968).

Although there are variations in rate, pattern, motivations, and repercussions, certain generalizations can be made about labor migration in the Third World based on reviews of the vast body of recent work. (Connell et al.1976, Gugler 1969, Todaro 1976, Lindsay 1985, and Simmons et al.1978). 1. Labour migration is overwhelmingly in a rural to urban direction with return migration only slightly reducing the net shift of the population. 2. Voluntary migration is primarily, although not exclusively, motivated by economic factors. Connell et al. (1976) have found that migration is better explained by the lack of opportunities for income generation in rural areas than by urban income prospects, which is the argument known as the "Todaro hypothesis." They also found that inequality of opportunity within the village was as important as the inequality of opportunity between the village and the town in motivating migration. 3. Migration is more common for young men in their 20's than any other groups, causing age and sex imbalances in the sending communities. Women, however, especially in Latin America are becoming more mobile, reducing this imbalance somewhat. (Todero 1976:66, Mitchell 1969:166). 4. Patterns of migration from rural areas tend to develop

in stages starting with a circular pattern and gradually stabilizing with longer periods of urban residence and a reduced rate of return migration. (Gugler 1969: 147).
5. Migrant remittances are unlikely to substantially change the villagers' prosperity unless investment opportunities exist in the village. Remittances tend to be used passively in the sense of going toward daily needs, short-term improvements in the household standard of living or larger investments in land and brideprices which reinforce traditional structures. This, in turn, fosters new migrant generations. (Najib 1986:143-148, Connell et al. 1976:99). As will be seen, Kerkennah fits very clearly into this general picture of labor migration.

There is less unanimity in migration studies about the ways in which migrants are tied to their places of origin. Back in the 1940's and `50's when migration studies in sub-Saharan Africa started to flourish, it was noted that migrants often live in a dual system with strong links with the rural home. (Read 1942). Watson (1958) and van Velsen (1960) found that the strength of this link was determined by the migrant's claim on tribally owned land which necessarily involved him in the traditional political system. Correspondingly, Read (1942) and Richards (1940) suggested that matrilineal societies where a man's interests in land, kin, and marriage were not consolidated in a single place were

less able to withstand the strain of temporary male migration than patrilineal societies with virilocal marriage and high marriage payments. Watson (1958). Mitchell (1969), Schapera (1947), and Mayer (1961) stressed that periodic return migration was differentially determined by the place of an individual in the life cycle. Often out migration was an obligatory form of initiation for young men which corresponded with a greater need for cash at that stage and return migrations were equally obligatory and advantageous at later stages in the developmental cycle.

Many studies have pointed to the insecurity of urban employment and the straddling of two economic systems as one of the reasons for maintaining loyal links with the rural home. (Van Velsen 1960, Watson 1958, Gulliver 1955). Loyalty in itself in the form of a religious-ancestral attachment to the place of origin also enters into the equation. (Najib 1986). Although Kerkennah is not a sub-Saharan society, most of these issues are relevant in looking at the link between the migrant and the islands. Rights in the patrimony, strength of the extended family as a corporate group, insecurity of employment, social and psychological insecurity of being in two "worlds", and emotional attachment to the homeland (blad) are all features which influence how and why the individual migrant relates to the islands.

At the level of the wider community, Kerkennah is

similar to numerous North African rural and tribal communities which have developed urban economic specialties that have become more or less monopolies. These specialties become an identifying emblem of the migrating group from the point of view of the wider society and a rallying point for other forms of group action such as political participation, which in turn reinforces the solidarity of the migrating group. These are examples of organized, specialized migration where the link with the sending community is an essential part of the cycle not only as an economic motivation, but also as a means of consolidating the grip on the long-distance economic specialty. The primary and original goal of all these internally organized migrations is to materially sustain and improve the sending community.

The Swasa, originating in the Sus area in the Anti-Atlas of Morocco, developed a monopoly of the grocery trade at the end of the nineteenth century starting in the Algerian city of Oran and then in Tangier, Casablanca, and other Moroccan cities. The **push** effect was a devastating famine in 1880-82 and the **pull** effect was a stimulated market for groceries caused by the increased presence of Europeans in the cities. From their stronghold in long-distance trade, they moved into party politics in the cities to which they migrated. John Waterbury argues that this political activity was a direct extension of their trading activities which were

based on patron/client networks within the migratory Swasa community. He further argues that both the commerce and politics were primarily geared toward providing security and protection for their clientèle and the Swasa as a whole rather than the maximization of profit or power in themselves. Waterbury maintains that the success of the Swasa in these two forums throughout the cities of Morocco is due to the fierce competition for prestige within the community which correlated with an equally fierce solidarity toward outsiders. In other words, he is saying that the intensity of the competition within the migratory community was an indication of how stong their identity as Swasa was. (Waterbury 1972; 1973).

Two other North African communities which have developed grocery monopolies in long-distance temporary migration are the Mzabites from the Mzab valley on the edge of the Sahara in Algeria and the Djerbans from the island of Djerba in the Tunisian Gulf of Gabes. Both of these groups are religious minorities, belonging to the Khaijite Ibadi sect which is strictly puritanical, fundamentalist, with a history of extreme separatism. Because of this distinctive religious identity, these Ibadi communities have been slow to become assimilated into the Sunni majority cultures of Tunisia and Algeria. Unlike the Swasa who are begining to bring more and more of their community of origin with them to the cities

(Adam 1972:337), the Mzabite community, because of its history as a theocracy with a sacred site, is not so mobile. Like the Swasa however, the Mzabite and Djerban long-distance grocery monopolies depend on the maintenance of a strong external boundary based on a common identity (reinforced by internal competition or religious doctrine) and an efficient internal communications network.

Other examples of organized, specialized temporary masculine migrations in Tunisia include the Chenini from southern Tunisia who are newspaper vendors in Tunis which is 340 miles away, the doughnut bakers (ftari) from Ghoumrassen, and the market porters from Tamezret. All of these monopolies are long standing from the late nineteenth century, took some time to develop and secure, and resulted from the migrant group finding (perhaps quite accidentally) some gap or niche in the urban economy that the indigenous urban class did not fill when the increased European presence made new demands on the economy.

All of these studies of specialist group migrations demand a new definition of community which is not based strictly on location. E.C.Lindemann simply suggests defining the community as all those **belonging** to a particular place, rather than all those living within its boundaries. (Lindemann [1930] as cited by Jackson 1969:6). Stephenson suggests that to understand rural-

urban migration, the definition might usefully be made more flexible to refer to cohesiveness, strong identity, and the ability to act collectively and maintain community organization over a non-contiguous space. (1976:109). This would allow the rural and urban subcommunities to be treated analytically within the same framework. It also avoids the common problem of treating the migrant or migrating group as abnormal and as a sign of the dysfunction of the sending community.

Migration is not a new phenomonon in Kerkenni society as was mentioned in Chapter One. As early as 1856, 1/5 of the population was routinely away from the islands pursuing the characteristic marine specialties of the islands. Then, like the other North African examples mentioned above, with the establishment of the French Protectorate and the modernization of the economy and the attendant increased need for cash, the Kerkennis found a number of specialist niches which they proceeded to develop and pursue mostly in circular migration. With Independence and new opportunities especially for the young and the educated, permanent individual migration increased. In a sense, migrating has become more "normal" than not and this has necessarily changed both the relationship of the urban and the rural "subcommunities" and the relationship of each with the mainland.

## The Modernizing Economy and Relations with the Mainland

"Sfax is like a hand extended to the West, to the interior lands. She had from the begining turned her back on the sea. The morphology of the city confirms this conception. Traditional economic activities were concentrated around the Bab Djebli at the northwest of the city behind the Grand Mosque where the old markets and fondouks (hostellry-storage houses for travelling traders) were concentrated. The port, developed at the end of the 18th century by foreigners for international commerce, was also fortified like the old city against maritime attack." (van der Meerschen, 1972)

A cold shoulder is certainly how the Kerkennis see Sfax's customary attitude toward them inspite of the fact that Sfax long enjoyed protection against foreign attack from Kerkennah and its shallow banks. As the era of piracy came to an end in the late 18th century and Mediterranean commerce increased, sea-going Kerkennis found a place in long-distance marine transport. This gave Kerkennah only a peripheral economic link with Sfax which had traditionally been an interior-facing commercial city.

In the mid-19th century two things happened to the Sfax economy which turned its attention to the sea and which affected Kerkennah: the rise of the olive oil industry and the abolition of slavery. It was only after the nomadic tribes in the interior were pacified and largely sedentarized in the early 19th century that Sfax turned its attention to the development of the now famous olive groves. In the mid-19th century olive oil became Tunisia's chief export, largely stimulated by the

growth of the soap industry in Marseille and the usurious control of this crop by the French through the manipulation of the Tunisian Bey (Valensi 1985:234-38). The export of this product necessarily turned Sfax's attention to the sea and gave the Kerkennis an enhanced role in the shipping industry.

In 1842 Ahmed Bey abolished slavery in Tunisia. This created a crisis for the Sfax economy which had been active in the slave trade. With the end of the overland slave trade, Sfax turned to the sea and traded more in marine products. This crisis in the economy created an opening for traditional Kerkenni products in the Sfax market: octopus, squid, sponges, and halfa grass products.

When the French Protectorate was established in 1881, one of its first tasks was to build a railway network. In 1899, a railway link between Sfax and Gafsa connected the port of Sfax with the inland sources of phosphates which have now become Tunisia's most important export. This had two effects on Kerkennah. Firstly, the port where Kerkennis had traditionally been employed became much more important in the Tunisian economy, pulling more Kerkennis into this occupational niche. Secondly, when the railway system was completed in 1918, the marine shipping link that the Kerkennis had participated in up and down the Tunisian coast was undermined. So Kerkennis, who had an early connection with the railway

through the export of phosphates from Sfax, started to seek more employment in this new transportation specialty. This is now one of the areas where Kerkennis are strongly represented. (Despois 1955:502)

There are two notable points about these early links with the mainland economy. None of them gave Kerkennis any access to actual capital enterprises. They were employed in manual and service roles which allowed them to send a portion of their pay back to the islands in the spirit of the subsistence ethic that has been discussed above. All of these occupations allowed for frequent or at least regular visits to Kerkennah so that a family household could be maintained on the islands. In this way, these long standing migrations away from the islands were really still part of the traditional economy and they did little to change Kerkennah's relationship to the mainland.

There are two important features of Kerkenni life which have led to changes in Kerkennah's relationship to the mainland and have afforded access to the modernizing economy. These are Kerkennah's particular reputation for scholarship and its participation in the trade union movement.

For reasons that are hard to identify, Kerkennis have a reputation for being particularly successful in school. This is a reputation they share with Djerba, their island neighbor to the south. Some of the reasons that are

offered for this are that with no land or capital to develop, this is the only road to economic mobility; that the islands are peaceful and quiet so there are no distractions or possibilities of early employment to lure students away from their studies; and that Kerkennah's commitment to an austere Qur'an rather than charisma based Islam has predisposed them to a high level of literacy.

Whatever the real reasons for this success, Kerkennis have managed to find their way into many areas of the national civil service. They were at a particular advantage when the French withdrew in 1956. The Sfaxi middle class, their natural competitors, were preoccupied with their stable traditional commercial and agricultural enterprises and the better educated Kerkennis were able to answer part of the demand for bureaucrats. Not surprisingly, they are particularly strong in those agencies that are related to the sea, ports, shipping, and to transport in general such as the Customs, the Post Office, the National Fisheries Bureau, and the railways. They are also well represented in the Ministry of Education. As noted above, these specialties tend to be concentrated among Kerkennis from a particular village. El Attaya controls the National Fisheries Bureau, Kellabine is strong in the Post Office, and Ouled Kacem in the Ministry of Education and Customs.

More powerful and more specific is Kerkennah's link

with the trade union movement. Farhat Hached, the founder of the movement who was martyred in the struggle for independence in 1951 was from the village of El Abbasia. He was succeeded by Habib Ashour, also from El Abbasia, who was the leader of this movement until he was outlawed during the General Strike of January 1978. He has since been reinstated and continues to be a champion of the trade union and is a popular hero throughout Tunisia. The UGTT (General Union of Tunisian Workers) has been a Kerkenni stronghold from the beginning. Not only has this given Kerkennis access to jobs on the mainland, but it has put Kerkennah on the map of national political consciousness.

In 1961 Habib Ashour organized a consortium of influential Kerkennis living and working on the mainland with the purpose of investing in the development of the Kerkennah and promoting the connection between Kerkennah and the mainland. This semi-private company with government sponsorship still exists and is called SOMVIK (Sociėtė de mise en valeur les Iles Kerkennah). (Margaret Kenna [1971] describes a similar organization in Athens instituted by labor migrants for the benefit of Nisos, their island home.) This company organized the building of the port at Sidi Youssef in 1963 and a subcompany of SOMVIK, SONOTRAK brought the first ferry to the islands in 1964. Before this, there had only been a small port at Sidi Fredj (built in 1952) from which a

motor boat went to Sfax three times a week. This first ferry which held seven cars had a tremendous impact on the islands. Not only did it shorten the journey to the mainland from up to 24 hours to less than two, but it brought motor vehicles to the islands, stimulated the building of roads and brought the individual villages into much more frequent contact with each other through the bus service that soon followed. Until these improvements were made in the 1960's, it was not uncommon for the three most easterly villages, El Attaya, Kraten, and Najet to be cut off from the other villages for up to three months in the winter due to the flooding of the salt flats (sebkha). Villages which may have had almost no exposure to each other were now tied together by the straight line of the raised road and the bus. Not only has the ferry and bus system made it easier for islanders to get about and to leave Kerkennah, but it has also made it easier for people to come back. This is especially important as migration becomes more permanent and as the ties of a large part of the urban subcommunity become more discretionary.

SOMVIK also built the Grande Hotel and a holiday camp with the aspiration of developing the tourist industry. So far the expectations about a booming tourist trade have been badly disappointed. SOMVIK has also organized the labor for many other projects including the construction of government subsidized housing. These

projects and a number of others not sponsored by SOMVIK, including an octopus freezing plant in El Attaya, are aimed at creating possibilities for capital development on the islands which would stem the flow of workers away from the islands.

Young men on Kerkennah speak more eagerly of having a "project" (mashru'`a) than they do of having a profession. But a "project" requires capital, which requires labor migration, the surplus from which tends to be absorbed by immediate and conventional needs, making capital accumulation exceedingly difficult. Such a project might be as minor as buying a power saw to set up a carpentry shop. But a power saw costs 1200TD ($3000 US) and before money could be set aside for this, a young wage earner (who might make 80TD/month as a waiter, 110TD/month as a construction worker, or 140TD/month as a civil servant of some rank) would be expected to make contributions to the following family expenses: household and life style improvements such as a new cistern (300TD), a television (250TD), a refrigerator (300TD), an extension to the house (200-300TD); education of younger siblings; and wedding expenses of brothers which can easily exceed 2000TD. These contributions would be on top of an ongoing contribution to the everyday expenses of the household. In addition to this, a young man might put first his own marriage expenses, the building of an independent house (at least 1500TD for a popular house)

or quite likely, a mobylette (250TD).

It is easy to see how difficult it is for an individual to develop his resources beyond the immediate cash demands of the extended family. It is equally apparent that the household economy needs a number and variety of kinds of incomes to be able to stay abreast of ordinary needs. Even a family which manages well within this system (meaning that its material standard of living is rising, the parents are being sent on the hajj, the sisters are being married sumptuously, and the married sons are building modern villas for their summer holidays) is not doing anything which contributes to the eventual transformation and independence of the island economy.

In spite of the efforts that have been initiated to transform the local economy by SOMVIK, government sponsored rural development programs and some individual investors, for the most part Kerkennah still fits the predominant Third World model of a rural subsistence economy being passively subsidized by cash remittances. This should not be taken to mean that the double economy lacks vitality, is unviable or inherently unstable. What is remarkable, in fact, is the persistence of this balancing act. While the traditional economy could not function independently of its subsidy, it also provides a minimum but critical foundation from which risk-taking forays into the modernizing sphere can be made. We move

now from an account of the traditional and modernizing economies and their interaction to an account of the interaction between local Kerkenni culture and the broader Islamic cultural repertoire.

## CHAPTER THREE

## ISLAMIC ISLAND CULTURE: KEY CONCEPTS

Every culture has certain key concepts which are particularly powerful tools for ordering and interpreting social reality. Taken together, these key concepts form an underlying pattern of meaning or world view which Dale Eickelman defines as "common-sense symbolic understandings of how the world `really' is." (1976:123). Normally these symbolic understandings are not articulated and are implicit, forming a background against which social life takes place. Key concepts, however, are also often explicitly elaborated and symbolized especially in the context of a formal religious ideology. These concepts as implicit understandings or explicit symbols are not just ways of understanding, but they are also charged with a kind of cultural energy which comes from their density of meaning. In his discussion of the development of Islamic culture, W. Montgomery Watt calls these kinds of symbols "dynamic images" which, as he says, are capable of generating or releasing psychical energy embedded within the ideational system. (1961:113). According to Watt, the most important "dynamic image" in Islam is the image of the "charismatic community" which attracts, energizes,

and culturally integrates the society that responds to it.

Sherry Ortner (1973) distinguishes two ideal types of key symbols, "summarizing" and "elaborating" symbols. Summarizing symbols, which are often sacred, are objects of attention and cultural respect which compound and synthesize a complex system of ideas under a unitary form. They catalyze emotions and generate an attitude of commitment. Elaborating symbols serve to order experience by providing symbolic orientations for thought or "root metaphors" and symbolic strategies for action or "key scenarios." Elaborating symbols are distinguished by their frequent recurrence in cultural behavior rather than their sacredness. Ortner further delineates the two kinds of symbols:

| Summarizing | Elaborating |
|---|---|
| focus on content | focus on form |
| quality of image | quantity of images |
| fundamentality | broadness of application |
| vertical connections | lateral connections |

An example of a summarizing symbol would be the Union Jack or the Our'an (Johnson 1979:175-86.) A summarizing symbol is most often an actual object which can "stand for", in an encapsulating way, a whole system of beliefs. The Our'an as a symbol is not just an element of Islamic orthodoxy, it "stands for" the whole of Islam as a system. Its efficacy as a summarizing symbol is to arouse feelings of commitment to the whole system for which it stands. An example of an elaborating symbol

would be the British concept of queueing or the Islamic concept of God's will (Eickelman 1976:126-30.) Elaborating symbols are of a different epistemological status from summarizing symbols. They are more likely to be abstractions which function analytically to make past experience comprehensible and to set out patterns for future action. God's will as an elaborating symbol in Islamic societies makes the chaos of experience, including misfortunes and inequalities, comprehensible and it orders the possibilities for future action by distinguishing between what man chooses and what God has chosen (maktub, literally, "it is written".)

I would argue that the power of the two key concepts that will be discussed in this chapter, and key concepts in general, lies in the fact that they are capable of being symbolized in both a summarizing and an elaborating way. It is their very flexibility and range in every direction that gives them their relevance and potency. Ortner says, "the keyness of a summarizing symbol derives from its ability to relate lower-order meanings to higher-order assumptions, or to "ground" more surface-level meanings to their deeper bases." (1973:1343). These concepts or symbols **do** get their centrality from the fact that they connect the everyday to the metaphysical, however, it is important to stress that the energy is not just in the direction of the transcendent and the charging of the mundane with religious meaning.

The explicitly sacred concept gets much of its authority from its profane echoes in everyday social life. (Geertz 1968:4). The two levels reinforce and intensify each other. The ways in which these two kinds of symbols or foci of meaning relate to each other also gives us a way to look at the question of the Big and Little Traditions of Islam. This dichotomy, also presented as a universalistic/particularistic, orthodox/popular, or literate/oral divide, is often described "agonistically" in terms of opposing teams in tension and competition, or as repellant poles of each other. It seems much more realistic and fruitful to me to look at the interdependence and even attraction between these two interpretations or systems of meaning, both of which are part of Kerkennah culture.

The kinds of dichotomies mentioned above, especially the literate/oral divide, tend to be treated as either absolute in representing fundamentally different modes of thought (Ong 1982) or irreversible in the sense of being stages on an evolutionary trajectory (Goody 1977). In his work on orality and literacy, Walter Ong distinguishes between primary and secondary orality.

Primary orality pertains to speech-based cultures with little or no literacy and secondary orality refers to the oral technology of television and radio superimposed on literate cultures. Ong argues that primary oral cultures have psychodynamic characteristics

which make them radically different from literate cultures. He further argues that when a culture achieves literacy, it experiences a cognitive shift that makes the special psychodynamics of orality inaccessible.

Jack Goody, in his work on the same subject, with a particular focus on the development of writing, is critical of the stark dichotomization of orality/literacy. However, he treats these modes of communication in a developmental framework and like Ong, argues that once people start writing and making lists and charts, there's no going back to speech-based thought or the cultural forms that come with it. (Lewis 1986a). These theories are problematical for the case of Kerkennah. As will be seen in the following discussion of key concepts, Kerkennah culture is manifestly oral, but this orality is expressed as much in the universalistic, literate, Qur'anic reaches of the culture as it is in the more particularistic, non-literate, and "folk" aspects of the culture. I would argue that rather than being a cultural lag (Ong also talks about residual orality), this oral style is a current and creative force which makes the universal and particular more accessible to each other. **"To each other"** needs to be stressed because this is not simply a case of a higher culture contacting and transforming a lower culture in its own image. The transformation works in both directions and in this case, the oralizing of the literate tradition is

one of the ways that the Big Tradition is transformed by the Little Tradition. In an Indian context, McKim Marriott has written about the universalizing of the parochial (the Sanskritization of local gods) and the parochializing of the universal (the localizing of the major Hindu gods) as a constant process of communication between the Big and Little Traditions within the village culture. (Marriott 1955). This account which stresses that both the parochial and the universal exist within the local culture and that the parochial has a dynamic authority of its own is helpful when looking at the oral interplay of the universal and parochial in Kerkennah culture.

"The word" (kalima) and "community" (jami`a) are two key concepts which are central to the expression and enactment of Kerkennah culture. They are not the only key concepts that could be elaborated, nor do they specify an entire world view. While not exhaustive or sufficient, they are still two essential pieces of the puzzle of Kerkennah culture. Nor are they exclusive to Kerkennah. Much of what is described in this chapter is probably also true of other communities in Tunisia and North Africa. For ethnographic reasons, I will confine my claims to Kerkennah and when I refer to a broader Islamic cultural repertoire, I will try to explain Kerkennah's relation to it.

Expressed within each of these concepts is a cluster

of meanings which reflect and reinforce each other, making the overarching concept more powerful. They each have an explicit set of Islamic manifestations which might be thought of as summarizing symbols or dynamic images. Each of the two key concepts also pervades the common-sense understanding of social reality. An especially important scenario for the implicit elaboration of these concepts is in the realm of sex roles. Male and female "readings" of "the word" and "community" are related to each other, but sometimes as negative images of each other. Finally, "the word" and "community" are interelated and can be used to explicate each other.

Underlying the many expressions of "the word" and "community" in Kerkennah culture are certain recurring mental formulae or metaphorical procedures which are less apparent than the key concepts themselves. They have to do with **how** Kerkennis formulate their thoughts about these deeply charged meanings rather than **what** they think. It is important to recognize these characteristic formulae not only to get a deeper understanding of how "the word" and "community" work, but also because they inform other symbolic forms in Kerkennah life.

The most apparent of these characteristic formulae is the prominence of form over content. Related to this is an aesthetic pattern of unpunctuated repetition. A metaphorical formula, which appears frequently and which

is also an example of the importance of form over content, is the procedure of exposure and covering.

These are all part of a style of thought the goal of which is unity. In different ways, cognitively, aesthetically, and metaphorically, they all seek to pull together, enclose, equate, reduce, summarize or make whole potentially disunified elements. Unlike the key concepts of "the word" and "community", which are articulated and elaborated to a great degree by the Kerkennis themselves, these formulae and procedures of thought are not self-conscious. They constitute, rather, a general cognitive predisposition. To use a rough physical analogy, one could say that they give Kerkennah conceptual life a positive charge in the direction of unity. The mundane implications of this unifying style of thought will be pointed out in the explication of these two key concepts, starting with "the word."

## THE WORD

"The word" in the shared mental life of the Kerkennis is first and foremost a spoken event. It would be difficult to overestimate the religious, legal, political or social importance of the spoken word on these islands. "The word" is also a sacred potency. Much of the power of "the word" comes from its religious associations with the Qur'an, the confession of faith, and other fundamental elements of Islamic precept and

practice. The spoken word in itself has a particular kind of power that derives from its dynamic character (it is sound moving through time) and its social character (it implies a speaker and an audience). (Ong 1982:32). Add to this the power of the sacred in this culture's most universalized forms and a force of enormous proportions is created. There are many instances in which this power is translated into the concrete and "the word" is symbolized as an object with physical attributes. It is noteworthy that the power of "the word" in an important sense is independent of its semantic meanings and intellectual content. This is consistent with the suggestion that the pre-eminence of form over content is characteristic of Kerkennah thought.

The Qur'an is the original and ultimate spoken word. Literally translated it means recitation. The Qur'an is the spoken word of God which was recited to the Prophet Mohammed by the Angel Gabriel and then repeated by Mohammed to his people. In some minimal sense, the history of Islam has been the uninterrupted recitation of the word of God. The emphasis on the holy act of speech, rather than on the text itself, is significant for understanding rural Islamic culture. The village holymen on Kerkennah manifest their holiness not by their knowledge of the Qur'an, but by the frequency and style of their recitation of it. During the month of Ramadan, groups of men gather and each night recite one of the

thirty subdivisions of the Our'an until they have uttered the entire text. There are two especially striking features of these recitations. One is that every verse is read or recited in succession by every man at the gathering. To be fully effective, the Our'an must be **said**, not just read, heard, or understood. The second striking feature is that many of the participants in these recitations are speaking the text without specifically comprehending it. The style and speed of recitation indicate that it is a rote exercise, the religious meaning of which comes primarily from the act of speech and not the act of contemplation or analysis. The traditional Islamic educational system is modelled after the Our'anic technique of recitation and repetition. The influence of this procedure is still evident in all Tunisian schools from primary to university level. This is all the more striking given the degree of Western laicization in Tunisia.

In their style of Our'anic delivery, Kerkenni men (I never heard a Kerkenni woman recite the Our'an from memory) are aspiring to a pan-Islamic ideal. They are exposed to many consistent models of this ideal from the most local to the most universal levels of their culture. The models range from the village meddeb (Our'anic school teacher) and imam (prayer leader) to radio and television broadcasts of recitations from all over the Islamic world. Cassette tapes of especially talented reciters,

often from Egypt and Iran, are prized gifts and played extensively during Ramadan. There is also an extensive classical literature about Our'anic recitation. Without perhaps having read it, the more religiously learned members of the community would know of its existence. There is considerable discussion about who among these many models performs well, but the criteria are clearly established and not controversial. They are recognized as being timeless and universal throughout Islam.

While the Kerkennis would not specifically have read the two contemplations on the correct principles of recitation which follow, they would be thoroughly familiar with their message. The primacy of oral style as the key to truly possessing the Our'an is beautifully expressed in the poetic instruction by Shaikh `Alam al-Din, recorded in the fifteenth century and quoted by Kenneth Cragg (1973:36). (Note: the word tajwid means recitation and a hamzah is a glottal stop in Arabic.)

> Have no exaggerated measures of tajwid
> Stressing where you have no warrant of the word.
> Do not weigh too heavily
> On the hamzah that follows the long vowel
> Do not chew your letter like a drunkard
> Or mouth your hamzah like one about to vomit,
> Scaring the listener to flee from the mess!
> Each word has its weight: do not crush it
> Like a tyrant, violating its due worth.
> When you open a syllable, use all gently,
> Without histrionics.
> Open or closed, give them their due.
> Thus to excel with the text
> Is to have its excellence.

The potency of the Our'an is increased through its

unremitting repetition. No individual should try to distinguish his recitation from the others with some personal flourish. There is one excellent way to recite the Qur'an and all should strive to reach this standard. Each participant benefits not from the particular interpretation of his companions, but from prolonged exposure to the spoken word of God. This physical contact with the word of God has the effect of a protective covering, making the recipient less vulnerable to human error.

This idea is expressed by al Ghazzali (A.D.1058-1111) in his theory of the recitaion of the Qur'an quoted by Abul Quasem (1982:62). Al Ghazzali argues that contained within the sounds of the letters is a state of mind or a spiritual location which protects the reciter or listener from distraction or error. (Note: "mim" is the letter "m" in Arabic, "ra" is the letter "r," and "ha" is the letter "h".)

> In the Qur'an is present that with which the soul can have warm relations if the reciter is fit for it. How can it seek an intimate connection with the thought of anything other than the Qur'an, seeing that the reciter is in a pleasant place and a place relieved of cares, and one who is relieved of cares in a pleasant place does not think of another place? It is said in the Qur'an are to be found fields, gardens, closets, brides, brocades, meadows, and khans. All the mims are the fields of the Qur'an , all the ra's are the gardens of the Qur'an, all the ha's are the closets....(Abul Quasem 1982:62).

The very sounds of the letters cause the reciter to taste the fruits, enter the closets, view the brides, wear the

brocades, and dwell in the khans, all of which absorb him totally and make him one with the Qur'an. The meaning of the Qur'an is induced by its sound rather than the text itself, another manifestation of the prominence of form over content.

The ideal attitude expressed in the style of reciting the Qur'an to which the Kerkennis subscribe illustrate all three of the cognitive formulae which characterize the unifying style of thought. Innovation, personal expression, analysis, and interpretation are precluded by the formal demands of the exercise. Order, speed, tone, posture, and countenance are prescribed. The reciter imitates an ideal delivery and in this way attempts to make his delivery one with the ideal. The concept of innovation (bid`a) in Islamic practice is equivalent to heresy. Similarly, an attempt to make individual or separate something which is universal and complete would contradict the entire purpose of Qur'anic recitation. In these terms, the outward form of the event totally precedes in importance the content of the experience. Repetition of pattern or the procedure of making each piece of the pattern equivalent and identical to the next is another quality of ideal Qur'anic recitation. The aesthetic aim is vocal monotony, evenness of breath and volume, and repetition of stress patterns. Just as the reciter tries to eliminate any distinction between his recitation and the next, or the ideal, so too does he try

to make each phrase tonally identical to the next. These uninterrupted patterns of repetition can also be found in Kerkennah folk music and visual decoration. There is a kind of unity in this aesthetic equivalence.

Through the persistent, circular repetition of the Qur'an, the participants and listeners become bathed in the wholeness of the message. They are exposed, immersed, covered and protected by the Holy Utterance even if they have not understood one word in a literal sense. With each repetition the layers of protection increase and the spiritual impact increases.

The power of the Qur'an is made even more manifest in those ritual circumstances when the holy word is literally replaced with a physical object. The best example of this is during the obligatory graveyard Qur'an readings which take place at dawn on major feastdays. Individuals remember their beloved deceased by performing a Qur'anic recitation over their graves. Those who are illiterate, however, leave a loaf of bread broken on the grave to which they would have dedicated their recitation. The bread is thus considered an act of charity (zakat) given to the poor in the name of the deceased. But the bread is also the physical symbol of the word of God. One of the words for bread is `ayish, life. The word of God is man's sustenance not just spiritually but physically as well, for without the instructions contained in the Qur'an, man would not know

how to live on the earth. The association of the Qur'an with bread and the word with an object is further reflected in Tunisia in the practice of quoting the price of a copy of the Qur'an in loaves of bread rather than money because it would be considered disrespectful to exchange money for the word of God. (Johnson 1979:168). Further, a scrap of bread found on the ground is treated in the same way as a page of the Qur'an would be. It is kissed, blessed aloud with a verse from the Qur'an and tucked away in a high safe place such as a crack in a wall. This is an attempt to counteract the offense against the symbols of Allah's generosity.

Sacred oaths are transformed into objects when visitors to saints' shrines make a conditional pledge to make a sacrifice to the saint if the saint cooperates in helping the suppliant in some way. The pledge (wa`ada) is represented by a knot in one of the flags over the tomb or a piece of fabric somewhere in the shrine. Neither the pledge nor the knot can be undone.

Calligraphy, considered the loftiest of the Islamic arts, and very much appreciated by the Tunisians, is another area in which it can be seen that the holy word is treated as an object with a potency independent of its semantic content. In calligraphic design, the Qur'anic verse becomes an emblem, a unity, an aesthetic object which derives its religious charge from its wholeness and not from the message that could be read if the design

were unwound. Once again the form is pre-eminent over the content.

The effectiveness of the holy word apart from its literal meaning and the importance of speech to activate its effect is further illustrated by the fact that immediately after birth, the father whispers the Islamic confession of faith, the shahada, "there is no god but Allah and Mohammed is his messenger," which is the first pillar of Islam, into the infant's ear. The very exposure to these spoken words brings the child into the house of Islam. According to the Kerkennis, so potent is this act that no matter what the child does in his life, there is no way to erase the effect of these words having been the first to "touch" him. These same words spoken in exactly the same manner are also the last to "touch" him for they are whispered into the ear of the corpse immediately before burial. Kerkennis know that a newborn does not understand and that a corpse does not hear, but this in no way diminishes the protective agency of the spoken word.

These same words are also all that is required to convert a heathen into a Muslim. Throughout my fieldwork, I constantly had people trying to cajole, coerce, or trick me into saying the essential words of the shahada. "It's so easy," they said, "all you have to do is say the words and then you will be a Muslim , the most desired of human conditions." My protests that I

could not because the words were not in my heart were in vain. "It does not matter," they said, "if you say the words, they will enter your heart." It was not important that I feel or understand or believe there is no God but Allah and Mohammed is his Prophet. The uttering of the words would be sufficient. The act of speaking these words which have a force of their own would cause my own will to be overwhelmed and I would involuntarily submit myself to the truth of Islam and the will of God.

The notion of the holy word as a protective device is manipulated extensively in Kerkenni traditional medicine as it is throughout the Islamic world. Many ailments are treated by various forms of exposure to the holy word as an autonomous object. For example, the patient might complain of stomach pains. The traditional healer (tbib `arabi, literally, Arab doctor) would write a carefully selected Qur'anic verse on a piece of paper. The patient would take this paper home, boil it in water, and then drink the water and wait for the risal or "message" (also a name for the Qur'an) to take effect. A variation of this treatment would be to burn the paper with the Qur'anic verse on it with incense, and for the patient then to inhale the "words" which are now contained in the "breath (rih) of Mohammed."

The use of Qur'anic amulets is also widespread. This device consists of a Qur'anic verse written by a healer or a holyman sewn into a little cloth bag, which

is pinned on the clothing of the person who is to be protected from the evil eye. As elsewhere in the Arab world, nearly all Kerkenni infants wear these prophylactics at least until they are weaned. Many adults, especially women, wear amulets as well. There is a proscription against the wearer actually reading the verse that is in his amulet which is another example of the power of the word as object exceeding its content.

All Kerkennis employ a little verbal prophylatic many times a day in the form of "Bismillah". This means, "in the name of Allah" and it is an emblem of the fatiha, the phrase which introduces every sura of the Qur'an. "Bismillah" is uttered automatically before eating, drinking, entering a room, getting into a boat or vehicle, upon tripping, slipping or stepping over water, all of which involve a potentially dangerous transition. This is a kind of all-purpose insurance covering against minor mishaps and against disturbing the jinns who dwell in boundary areas and damp places.

The holy word is used in a defensive manner similar to amulets against scorpions. Qur'anic verses are put up near the doorway of the house. Although scorpions may still enter the house, it is believed that exposure to the holy word will incapacitate them and make it impossible for them to do any harm to the inhabitants. The word for amulet is hejab, which literally means veil. Hejab also refers to a section of the Qur'an. The holy

word as an amulet becomes a symbolic object which cloaks the subject and protects him from impure and malevolent influences in the environment. (Myntti 1983:79). Another word for amulet is hirz, meaning fortified place which reinforces the idea of the word as a form of protection. (Johnson 1979:184). Kerkennis use both of these words, although hejab is more common.

Protection, covering, headcloth, guard, and forgiveness all come together in the same Arabic root: gh-f-r. (Wehr 1976:677-78). Ghafr in Arabic means the covering of something to protect it from dirt and it also means forgiveness. When people ask to be forgiven for their sins, they say, "istighfar Allah" which means, "may God cover me and protect me from the errors to which man is liable." (Khan 1971:lviii). Interestingly, this plea for forgiveness, istighfar Allah, is usually uttered by someone who has just received a compliment for doing something well. The idea is that it is dangerous for a man to distinguish himself for it may be thought that he is comparing himself to God. The Kerkennis have a maxim which reflects this principle, "Praise is for God, not for people."

Another religious concept which employs the image of covering is that of infidelity or unbelief. The Arabic word is kafara, which literally means to cover God's signs so that they are not visible to the kafir or infidel. (Munson 1980:52). The procedure of covering

for protection from exposure to malevolence is practiced in a very literal way when it comes to the evil eye. The idea is that eye contact rather than mere physical proximity constitutes exposure. So this dangerous gaze can be interrupted and disarmed by any kind of veil or covering. Hence, vulnerable people and objects, such as babies, sick people, women, people under the full moon, people undergoing ritual role transformations, meat and drinking water have a protective barrier introduced between them and the source of danger. This barrier can be anything from a shroud to a piece of newspaper to the Our'anically infused smoke of the incense pot. (In most circumstances, Kerkenni women do not wear veils, but they do adopt the protective "covering" described here.)

In all these uses of "the word", the Our'anic recitation, the confession of faith, calligraphy, traditional medicine and protective devices, the crucial feature is some kind of non-intellectual contact with or exposure to "the word" or to those objects which represent it. None of this is meant to imply that the intellectual, semantic aspect of the holy word is insignificant in Kerkennah culture, but as far as focusing cultural attention and energy is concerned, it is secondary.

Islamic law (shari`a) is a domain where the literal meaning of the text regains its prominence, but it is also a domain in which the word as a spoken event is

greatly highlighted. Although Tunisia now has a secular legal system in which Kerkennah participates, the spirit of the shari`a is still very present and active. This is particularly true in those areas that have to do with oaths, consent, and testimony, all fundamentally oral. The older members of the population remember the days when the shari`a was the law of the land and certainly still consider the principles upon which it is based religiously and socially sound, if not legally binding. One of these principles is that a verbal agreement is more valid legally than a written agreement. (Schacht 1964:117). By strict traditional interpretation, the written contract can only be substituted for a verbal contract if one of the parties is mute. Similarly in North Africa generally, legal consent is a verbal act (Geertz 1979:215). A mere signature is not a sufficiently sound form of witness to be effective on its own. For instance, marriage contracts depend on verbal consent and in fact, literally translated, the word for marriage contract, sdaq, means to say the truth.

The role of the sound witness (`adl) who gives verbal testimony is another important oral element of Islamic law and a role still very much exercised in the settlement of local disputes on Kerkennah. Local disputes are still often brought to the attention of the village imam who invokes the principles of the shari`a before the dispute is turned over to the secular and

official legal system. Perhaps the best known and most dramatic illustration of the legal potency of the spoken word is the triple verbal repudiation of a wife by her husband which results in divorce. I should add again here that in Tunisia the official legal system no longer recognizes divorce by repudiation, but in the more traditional communities such as Kerkennah, this practice is not entirely obsolete and can still be socially effective.

The social effectiveness of the spoken word is nowhere more apparent than in the market place. Bargaining, the well-known Middle Eastern drama, is necessarily a spoken event. As Clifford Geertz nicely puts it, "For all the actual jostling that goes on in a bazaar mob, something most people take more or less in stride, the real pushing and shoving is done with talk." (Geertz 1979:202). Bargaining usually follows a fairly rigid verbal formula. Even if the end result is known in advance by all parties, as in a real ritual, the event does not yield the satisfaction if the full procedure is not followed (which is also the case in a real ritual.)

The spoken word is no less potent in the modern economic sphere. Nearly all business, even if it has been initiated in writing, must be reiterated and confirmed in person. A man's honor is his word. He can only give his word in speech. Reducing a man's word to writing robs him of his honor and undermines the

essential element of the contact, trust. Of course, modern business is documented and recorded, but this is very much a secondary and sometimes almost incidental by-product of the essential spoken transaction. (Geertz 1979:215).

In business and in more casual social life, a certain atmosphere of familiarity, interest and acceptance must be created before any substantive exchange or activity can take place. This is done with an extensive set of greetings and blessings. The spoken word in this form is the crucial lubricant of social life. For every occasion, time of day, and stage in the life cycle, there is a carefully prescribed set of greetings which initiates nearly every social encounter on Kerkennah. This may seem trivial and obvious until one appreciates the absolutely obligatory nature of this etiquette and the number of minutes (and even hours!) expended on it in the course of an ordinary day.

These obligatory greetings are spoken in very much the same style as the Qur'an is read. That is to say, the words are delivered in a very rapid, high pitched monotone. Each phrase is repeated numerous times by each participant. While a strict formula is followed, there is no intention that the actual words be understood or that the ritual inquiries be answered. The greeters rattle off their formulae simultaneously and sometimes even in unison. In English this would sound like, "How

is your husband, how are your children, how is your whole house, how is everyone and your husband is he fine and your children too? Hopefully everything's alright and if God wills it, there will be no trouble." They express their sincerity and interest not through choice of words, but by the speed and frequency of their dramatic delivery. The repetition of pattern in greetings is very important because a greeting spoken only once can be almost an insult.

Excellence of verbal style is a very important personal quality. People often comment on someone's style of speech and skill at greeting people and this is taken as a sign of the quality of their personality. As with the presentation of the Qur'an, the presentation of the self is a phenomenon in which verbal style represents the inner character. In this case, form **is** content.

When young Kerkennis are asked about the characteristics of an ideal spouse, the most desired quality for both men and women is akhlaq. In literary Arabic this word means both morality and good manners. (Fisher 1978:196). Related to akhlaq are the words khalq, meaning nature or constitution, and khulq, meaning manner or qualities. The dual meaning of the idea of akhlaq reflects the principle of outward form representing inward content which manifests itself in many contexts in Kerkennah culture. When asked to define akhlaq the young marriageable Kerkennis

characteristically focus on the external form and say "deportment, good manners, and above all, a nice way of speaking."

While it is agreed that words and verbal style are of utmost importance for both males and females, the ideal style and attitude toward the spoken word differ considerably depending on whether this matter is given a male or a female reading. For instance, a man who is admired is called "a man who greets people well," an intelligent man is "a man with strong words." It is not just a linguistic coincidence in Arabic that male maturity and verbal eloquence come from the same root, balagha: to achieve male maturity and balugha: to be eloquent. (Wehr 1976:73, Patai 1973:49). It is also interesting that the noun of this word (mubalagha) means verbal exaggeration. Hyperbole, at least for men, like repetition, is the norm in Kerkenni social intercourse. A parallel concept to balagha and akhlaq is bashart which has three meanings: religious reason, male maturity and the ability to speak in public as the group representative. (Cuisinier 1976:145, Wehr 1976:60-1). The emphasis is on attaining the age of reason as far as religion is concerned. The term is never applied to a female, for presumably the female moral sense never develops sufficiently to allow her to make religious decisions. The coincidence of the ideal of speech, the ideal of manhood and the ideal of religion or morality in

these three terms, balagha, akhlaq and bashart, is deeply revealing.

The ideal verbal style and the moral connotations of speech for females are quite different. For instance, the ideal wife must have soft words, "she must not beat her husband with her words," as the Kerkennis say. A woman's words have less weight than a man's. Traditionally female testimony has 2/3 the legal weight of a man's testimony (Schacht 1964:193). Men's names come from the Qur'an and women's do not. (The name Mariam is the only exception.) A man must pray five times a day, but this is somewhat optional for a woman who can be covered or included in her husband's prayers.

It is more difficult for a woman to use words publicly to good effect. Her words can easily be used against her, so it is incumbent on her to control her speech as much as possible. One sometimes sees a woman whose speech is out of control seeking a maraboutic cure for this illness in a saint's shrine. The symptom of this characteristically female mental disturbance is an involuntary, unstoppable flood of words which may or may not make sense. This is different from speaking in tongues because the woman is not in a trance and no sacred significance is attributed to the words coming out of her mouth. Just as the Kerkenni's say that a woman's ugliness is her protection, the same is true of her silence. No shame can come to an ugly, silent woman.

Even in private a woman must be cautious in her speech. There are still some older women on Kerkennah who are ashamed to address their husbands directly by name and use the names of their oldest children to address them instead. I was told by one woman of her shame of opening her mouth in her husband's presence to put food in and of her insistence on the children introducing any medicine to her husband's mouth. Perhaps the mouth is too much like a sexual orifice. It is very shameful behavior for a woman to open her mouth and laugh out loud. The proper form if a woman insists on being amused is a quiet titter behind a hand.

But a woman's silence can be used as a positive social act. She is admired for being verbally receptive, listening quietly to her husband. In the past, silence or quiet weeping was interpreted as her necessary legal consent to a marriage contract. (Schacht 1964:117) Also, her silence, lack of social weight, and underdeveloped moral sense allow her to be insignificantly present at many conversations from which her male counterpart would be excluded. This, of course, is a source of valuable information and also the reason why little Kerkenni girls are much more socially knowing than their male counterparts.

When applied to sex roles, it is clear that the spoken word has many ambiguous qualities. As a social potency it can be said to have a dual character. The

spoken word, klam in the sense of an individual's ability to greet people expansively and to exercise the available verbal forms fully is a measure of a man's influence in the community. Klam in the sense of gossip is a measure of the community's influence over him. The former sense is much more important for males and the latter sense is much more important for females. It is a man's job to represent his family in public, to be verbally expansive in the streets and cafes, to make sound verbal contracts in legal and business matters, to express himself politically and to pray in the mosque. It is a woman's job **not** to be talked about.

We find in the dual idea of klam complete consonance between reputation and personality. A person is not only his own words, but also other people's words. Gossip or klam en nass either validates or undermines the individual's presentation of him or herself. Whether a bit of gossip is true or not is of no consequence. The fact that the words have been said at all is the effective issue and the situation that must be responded to. The undoing of serious gossip is a legal procedure which involves a series of public oaths and denials. Even then, the original damaging act of speech is so powerful that its effect can never be entirely erased, just as even the most irreligious person cannot entirely negate the impact of those first holy words whispered into his ear at birth.

Kerkennis realize that there is something irreversibly dangerous about the spoken word. This is why men, whose public words are so powerful, are unlikely to pronounce the devastating oaths that angry Kerkenni women are known for. The community is somewhat amused when a woman curses her cherished son saying, "may you spend your fortune on medicine" because of the strength of her love and the weakness of her sex. However, it would be a very fearful occasion indeed if a father uttered such a curse. His words are too strong. He must not abuse this power even in a joking way. This male verbal power is recognized by the shari'a, too, which holds that if a man were to utter the divorce formula as a joke, the divorce would still be valid if there were witnesses present. (Schacht 1964:164). Although this is no longer adhered to on Kerkennah, the threatening character of a man's words in such contexts is treated very seriously.

The malignant potential of the spoken word found in gossip and curses also requires that certain kinds of information be whispered or communicated non-verbally. For example, when asked in public how many children she has, a woman will rarely answer aloud. Instead, she will whisper the answer or hold up the correct number of fingers. Illness, recent births, and major acquisitions are also whispered subjects. These are all circumstances of vulnerability and to speak loudly of these events

would be to invite the attention of malicious or envious influences.

Powerful forces always have a threatening potential and must be treated with suitable respect. The spoken word in traditional Kerkennah society is such a force. This applies to the word whether it is village gossip or the word of God. The threatening quality of the latter is reflected in an alternate name for the Our'an, which is "the Warning".

## THE COMMUNITY

The community, jami`a, is just as potent a concept in Kerkennah culture as the word, kalima, to which it is closely tied. On Kerkennah there is perfect consonance between the local community and the ideal of the community of the faithful, or umma, for no member of this society is a non-believer. The community has implications of unanimity and completeness. It is unanimous in its convictions and the umma represents the complete population that will be saved on Judgement Day.

Just as the Our'an is the spiritual foundation of Islam, the community is the social foundation of Islam. The community allows man to serve God and carry out the obligations of Islam that would be impossible if he were a lone soul for prayer (salat), alms (zakat), and pilgrimage (hajj) all imply community.

The attention of the local community is drawn together five times a day by the muezzin who calls the faithful to prayer with the adhan, "the announcement:"

"Allah is the most great. I testify that there is no god besides Allah. Come to prayer! Come to salvation! Allah is the most great. There is no god besides Allah."

The local community is unified with the universal umma by the fixed form and content of the obligatory prayers and the fact that these hundreds of millions of Muslims are all turned toward a common focal point: Mecca, the site of the original local community. And, of course, saving time zone differences, they would all be doing it at the same moment. The uniformity of the salat gives much force to the connection of the local community with the universal Islamic community.

The zakat or obligatory alms also circumscribe the community in a universal and local way. The zakat is incumbent upon all Muslims who are able to pay it and is for the benefit of those who are not able. Officially, it is meant to be a tithe and is based upon the idea that each Muslim should be morally responsible for the welfare of the forty people nearest to him. The universal rule based on the example of the Prophet's original community reinforces the solidarity of the local community.

The pilgrimage to Mecca, the hajj, is the ultimate identification of the individual with the universal community of Islam. It is incumbent once in a lifetime upon those physically and materially able. It is one of

the few times when an individual lets go of his local community, in this case, by literally leaving it behind in order to become one with all Muslims. When he returns to his local community, he, himself, becomes a tangible symbol of the universal community as a hajj, a pilgrim.

The spiritual goal of the community is to replicate the original Islamic community of the Prophet Mohammed and his companions. To the degree that the community succeeds in this quest, it is a holy entity and the community worships itself. In this sense, Islamic communities might be said to be more Durkheimian than thou. The image of the original community of the Prophet is held up as an ideal precedent to be **recovered** rather than achieved. It is something available through the correct practice of Islam. The rules for this correct practice are in the Qur'an and the hadith, the reports handed down by those who knew the Prophet, his immediate community. There is a strong local echo of this drive to recover an ideal of community in Kerkennah's historical self-image. As mentioned in Chapter Two, the generic "before" (qbal) or "early" (bikri) was a time when people are reported to have shared spontaneously even though they were much poorer; women had more shame, hishma; and everyone fasted (sawm) during Ramadan. "Everyone was on the straight path (el mustaqim) then."

The only effective argument I could come up with against the constant attempts to get me to convert to

Islam mentioned above was to say that if I did, I would be spiritually isolated from my family and community. My would-be converters were always sobered by this problem because of their identification of Islam with community and also because of their passionate conviction that there is no fate worse than being alone. The idea of being a lone Muslim somewhere was unimaginable.

The three unifying habits of mind of form over content, patterns of repetition, and exposure and covering discussed in relation to "the word" are also extensively employed in the elaboration of the concept of community. The precedence of form over content is reflected in the persistant submission of the individual to the group. This is the social parallel to the act of submission to the will of God which is the ultimate meaning of Islam. The willfulness and tendency toward error of the exposed and vulnerable individual is enveloped and controlled by the community. The individual is protected by the collective judgement of the group. Individual opinion (ra'y) and innovation (bid`a) are submerged in the general will of the community.

A general implication of the prominence of form over content is not just the diminished importance or submission of the individual, but also the reduced moral and social boundaries **between** individuals. One aspect of this is manifested in the concept of zulm an nafs which

means "the wrong-doing of people," but literally, "the wrong of the self against the self." This concept can be thought of as the negative image of the moral community. Zulm an nafs is a shared characteristic of the community which universalizes and makes plural the nature of guilt. (Cragg 1973:100). This is another way in which the character of the individual is submerged in and covered by the general character of the community.

The social correlate of this is played out in the family ethic of honor and shame. The boundaries between individuals are so low that individual behavior readily spills over and becomes part of the reputation of those nearby. There is a great deal of Mediterraneanist literature about the need to control a woman's sexuality in order to protect the honor of the family and in this respect, Kerkennah is a true Mediterranean society. (Peristiany 1965). It is important to stress that although formally men are controlling women's behavior, the men are just as subject to the threat of notoriety as women are.

The lack of boundaries between individuals is physically expressed all the time simply in terms of physical space. People sit, talk, and stand very close to each other, touching frequently, whether they are in close quarters or in an open space. Women often pick up each other's hand work and both men and women in same sex dyads will adjust each others clothes and hair as if

looking in a mirror. Limited personal space and bodily privacy are features of the kif-kif egalitarian ethic in which the individual seeks equivalence, identification, and unity with the group.

The community and the word are closely associated concepts. Access to the community is gained through the word, that is, by speaking the confession of faith, the shahada. This verbal act is the minimum, essential and sufficient key to membership in the community of the faithful, the umma. Just as the words cannot be unsaid, membership cannot be revoked.

The boundaries of the community are established and maintained by the word. The community is that area of society within which the word is an effective and sufficient guarantee of the terms of social interaction. Outside the community, the word is no longer sufficient and other rules must be invoked.

Consensus or ijma` is the verbal manifestation of the community. Ijma` and jami`a come from the same root meaning to gather together. Consensus is a basic legal and social procedure which characterizes nearly all communal decision making. Through consensus the community presents itself as a unified word; it becomes a communion of opinion.

In Islamic orthodoxy, consensus is the third basis of Islamic law after the Our'an and the hadith which are the traditions of the Prophet. In other words, the chain of

command is the word of God, the word of the Prophet, and the word of the community. Even now when the local community has no civil authority to legislate, it still legislates morally through consensus. The power to do this is sanctioned by the capacity to totally ostracize a violator, by the lack of cultural space for non-conformists, innovators and loners, and the absence of any social alternative to the local community.

When I first arrived on Kerkennah, I wanted to go into one of the mosques. I asked a group of men who were standing in front of the mosque if this would be alright. Being new in the field, when I saw the slightest flicker of resistance, I totally gave up the idea. But the men discussed the question back and forth among themselves. They continued the discussion long after it was clear that the vast majority thought my entering was a bad idea. The discussion did not end until the last dissenter submitted his will to the will of the group. The drive for unanimity is strong. In such circumstances agreeing to disagree or taking a vote is not a comfortable alternative.

It often happens when a consensus cannot properly be reached, that the decision or dominant opinion is manipulated to create the impression of consensus or else the boundaries of discussion are expanded to such a degree that the difference of opinion is encapsulated or covered by a wider context of consensus. Clement Henry

Moore (1973) gives an interesting account of how President Bourguiba has successfully manipulated the traditional principle of ijma` in national politics to disarm potentially opposing groups by anticipating their interests and expanding the political territory of the Destour Party to outflank and envelope the opposition. Formal unity is preserved.

All of the town meetings I attended on Kerkennah were run by the mayor in such a way as to promote a consensus-like appearance. Although these are secularly run, the meeting begins with everyone rising and repeating the fatiha and each speaker introduces his statement with a "bismillah." These gestures create a more formalized and even religious atmosphere and as Bloch says in his work on political oratory, a move toward the formalized is a move toward unity. (Bloch 1975:16). The standard procedure is for a prepared statement of the business at hand to be read by a clerk at breakneck speed, not unlike the velocity of a Qur'anic recitation. Then all objections and comments are presented in succession. The meeting ends with a long statement from the mayor which theoretically encompasses, answers, and settles all questions and objections and which is put forth as the will of the community. This inflexibility of form submerges the specifics of the agenda into the generalized code of the consensus-seeking community. Bloch argues that formalization in oratory is a form of

social control. (1975:22). He describes political oratory as a "restricted code" in which by moving the specific into the eternal and the fixed, communication is moved to a level where disagreement is ruled out since one cannot disagree with the **right order.** (1975:16). Bloch's model applies to this aspect of Kerkennah political life. The eternal and the fixed is invoked by the sprinkling of formal prayers and blessings throughout the meeting. Disagreement (content) is submerged in the right order (form) of the meeting. (cf. Sally Falk Moore [1975] on the "simulation of unanimity" through the ritualization of political meetings among the Chagga of Tanzania).

Consensus-seeking reflects all three of the mental procedures which characterize the Kerkenni unifying style of thought. In consensus the specific is submerged and subordinated to the general, or at least the divergent contents are given the external form of unity. The attempt to achieve a complete set of identical opinions is an example of the seeking of patterns of repetition. The protection of the community member from individual responsibility in the fortress of collective judgement is a form of protective covering from dangerous exposure.

Another area in which the concepts of community and the word are linked is community knowledge accumulated through oral history. On Kerkennah there are many kinds of important information that have never been recorded,

but are nevertheless essential to the current running of the society. This body of oral history discussed in Chapter Two includes information about land tenure, fishing rights, genealogies, marriage patterns as well as mystical knowledge about local saints and curing practices all of which considerably influence people's contemporary choices and behavior and without which one could not really function as a Kerkenni. Theoretically any stranger can acquire knowledge that is written down. However, community knowledge acquired orally is a kind of verbal enclosure drawing a very definite boundary around the community. The community, very simply, is those **who know.**

An important characteristic of this powerful concept of community which is based upon a common confession and common knowledge is that it is mobile. As long as these verbal links are maintained and publicly acknowledged, the boundaries, rules, obligations, and degree of identification can be just as strong for a non-resident Kerkenni as for a full-time islander. To be a Kerkenni, one must pay lip service in the most serious sense to being a Kerkenni. This transportable quality of community is very important, of course, when more than two-thirds of the active, identifying members live outside the recognized physical boundaries of the community.

As with the word, the concept of community has

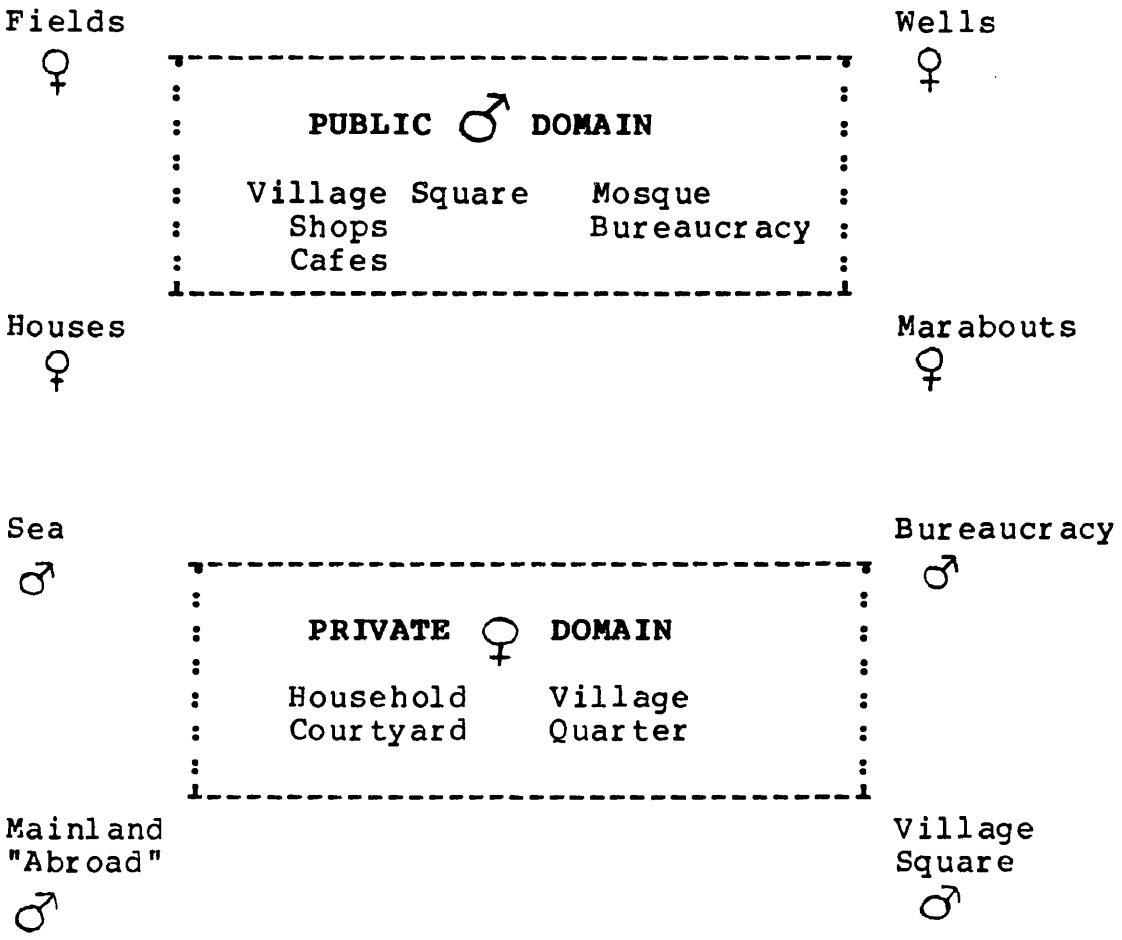
different implications depending on whether it is given a male or female reading. For a man, the idea of community brings up all sorts of questions about the boundaries of the group and the moral, economic, and political defense of these boundaries. Theoretically, a woman is so contained and "covered" by the community that she knows nothing else. She never gets so close to the boundary of the community that she would need to distinguish members from non-members. A man needs a sorting mechanism because his dealings bring him closer to the frontiers of the community. Man needs bashart, judgement, to recognize the false and the true. Man has need of wisdom and judgement, but this exposes him to the dangers of weightless individual opinion. However, the community protects him from this vulnerability to error with the collective wisdom of consensus.

A woman who is not thought to have the moral capacity of judgement is doubly protected for she submits herself to her husband or her father, who in turn submits himself to God and the community. Her contact with the community and her commitment to Islam are mediated and validated through her male protector. A woman without this kind of protection is uncovered. It is said in Kerkennah and elsewhere in rural Tunisia that a widow should be "covered" (sutra) with a new husband. (Cuisinier 1976:142).

Just as a woman's silence has a positive moral value,

there is a self-effacing quality to her religious practice. She absents herself in a number of ways to her religious credit. She stays away from the mosque where she is not allowed and often not knowing how to pray, she will seek salvation through extensive fasting (women have a better record for fasting than men) and pious submission to her male, religiously active, protector. This passive/negative religious ideal for women is also reported elsewhere in Tunisia by Abu Zahra (1978:21), Ferchiou (1972:47-69), and in Morocco by Maher (1973:102).

The positive and active version of the community in the clearly bounded domain of women is **company** and its attendant rituals of hospitality and entertainment. Next to children, there maybe no greater good than being "with people." Even an obnoxious neighbor is preferable to solitude. Because this domain is so well-contained within the boundaries of the community, a great deal more verbal dissent and controversy is tolerated with less energy spent on seeking consensus. Company, visiting and hospitality take place within the domestic compound with its central courtyards, the domain controlled by women where men are kept on the periphery. Community in its public and religious manifestations takes place in the administrative center or village square, the domain of men where women are kept on the periphery.




The tension between the male and female domains is a result of their mutually defining visible and invisible boundaries. It is not the case that the female domain and the female reading of "the word" and the "community" are entirely negatively determined by the male domain and interpretation. Just as the parochial culture has an indigenous power that has a creative impact on the universal culture, the female domain has its own characteristic power to which the male domain reacts and

adapts. Both the distinctiveness and interdependence of the male and female domains are highlighted in the life cycle rites of passage which are analyzed in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER FOUR

## GENDER, IDENTITY, AND THE RITUAL LIFE CYCLE

### GENDER AND MORAL DEVELOPMENT

To discuss sex roles in Kerkennah society, one must start with the fact that males and females are thought to be of profoundly different natures. Because of this difference by nature rather than degree, it is not thought remarkable by Kerkennis that males and females should be brought up differently, be educated differently, have different domains of influence, and have different things expected of them socially, intellectually, and morally. Not only are males and females thought to have different ultimate moral and cognitive capacities, but the expected schedule of development is different as well. Females become physically independent and acquire personal responsibilities earlier than males. They are also thought to reach their full intellectual and moral growth earlier. Males are thought to develop more slowly and to go through more abrupt stages. They are also thought to continue to develop well past adolescence. According to Kerkenni thought, males achieve a level of rationality and capacity for moral and religious judgement (basira) that is not available to females. Females in many ways

are thought to reach their highest human potential while still in maidenhood. This pinnacle includes a combination of spirit (nafs), purity of motive or intention (niya), intelligence in the form of social propriety (akhlaq) and responsibility (`aqel), and most important, modesty and shame (hishma). With marriage, sexual knowledge and experience, women are more likely to deteriorate morally than to develop. Hence, modesty, obedience, and restraint, themes stressed since her infancy, are a woman's protection. This is in contrast to the parallel attributes of eloquence (balagha), influence (qadr), and judgement (basira) which are fostered in males. Males, who are little devils when young, are thought to continue to increase in rationality (`aqel), morality (akhlaq), and wisdom (`alm), reaching the peak of their development only in old age.

Although I am referring specifically to Kerkennah, it is not surprising to find these same beliefs elsewhere in North Africa, as expressed in the following male proverb of the Chaouia in the Aurès mountains:

> "The child of male sex comes to the world with sixty jnun in his body; the child of the female sex is born pure; but every year, the boy gets purified of a jinn, whereas the girl acquires one; and this is the reason that old women, sixty years old and with sixty jnun are sorcerers more malignant than the devil himself. Blind she sews more material, lame she jumps over rocks and deaf she knows all the news." (Gaudry 1929: 267 as quoted in Nelson 1974:556).

This inverse relationship of male and female moral development is also reported by Dwyer in her Moroccan

research. (1978:53,66). Similarly, on Kerkennah boys are expected and allowed to be wild and irresponsible when young precisely because when they grow up, the development of their natural capacity for wisdom and responsibility and the sobering weight of their adult obligations are assured. Girls, who do not have this natural capacity for responsible behavior, must be more self-disciplined from the begining. In other words, boys can act like little animals because their true and ultimate nature is wise and responsible and girls must behave conservatively because their true nature is thought to be wild and animal-like. Hence, the very great emphasis on sexual shame for females.

These qualitative differences are reflected in the sexually weighted readings of the key concepts discussed in Chapter Three. They are also symbolized extensively in the ritual system, especially in the rites of passage which dramatize the graduation or transformation from one social role to another. Figure Three shows the male and female life cycles and the corresponding ritual and social markers and moral characteristics for each stage of development. It is significant to note that males receive a good deal more ritual attention early in their lives than females do.

| | MALE | | FEMALE | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| STAGE | RITUAL AND SOCIAL MARKERS | DEVELOPMENTAL CHARACTERISTIC | RITUAL AND SOCIAL MARKERS | DEVELOPMENTAL CHARACTERISTIC |
| NEW BORN | (loud) welcome<br>anti-evil eye rituals<br>naming (religious significance) | | (subdued) welcome<br>anti-evil eye rituals<br>naming (insignificant) | |
| INFANCY | 40 Day Ceremony (elaborate): 1st haircut, 1st sex specific clothes, 1st chair sitting<br>late weaning | nafs | 40 Day Ceremony (underplayed): 1st sex specific clothes<br>early weaning | nafs<br>hishma |
| CHILDHOOD | circumcision<br>Qur'anic School<br>Primary School | "shitan" | Primary School<br>personal religious observance | aqel<br>akhlaq |
| ADOLESCENCE | High School<br>personal religious observance | aqel<br>akhlaq<br>niya | (High School)<br>engagement<br>marriage | |
| ADULTHOOD | engagement<br>military, travel, study<br>marriage, regular mosque attendance | basira<br>balagha<br>baluq | | |

Figure 3. Male and Female Developmental Life Cycles

| TERMS | | |
|---|---|---|
| akhlaq | اخلاق | character = deportment<br>= morality |
| 'aqel | عقل | intelligence, responsibility |
| balaga<br>baluq | بلاغة<br>بلوغ | eloquence<br>male maturity |
| bashara | بشر | to preach<br>to be a man<br>to speak for the group |
| basira | بصيرة | judgement<br>perception |
| hishma | حشمة | sexual shame, modesty |
| nafs | نفس | spirit, flesh centered self |
| niya | نية | intentionality |
| 'shitan | شيطان | devil |

Figure 3. Key Terms

So profound are the differences between males and females thought to be that they begin to manifest themselves before the child is even born. Kerkennis state that male fetuses are active and kicking in the womb, while female fetuses lie still. This belief both initiates and summarizes the essence of Kerkenni sex role differences. There are various tests that can be performed with the mother's breast milk from the seventh month onward which are said to indicate the sex of the fetus. For example, there is a test in which the mother-to-be expresses a few drops of breast milk into her hand and puts a louse in it. If the louse leaves the milk, it will be a boy. If it stays in the milk, it will be a girl. Another version of the same test involves burying a louse with a little sand in the mother-to-be's palm. If the louse climbs to the surface, it will be a boy. If the louse escapes from the side, it will be a girl. Similarly, there are other "sure signs" such as the pallor or flush of the mother's complexion and the belief that female fetuses ride "in the lap" and male fetuses "astride the hips." During labor, females are said to cause rhythmic pain which comes and goes, while males cause constant pain. The significance of all these convictions is the universal concern over the sex of the baby and the prenatally fulfilled expectation that the behavior of males and females will be distinct.

The sex of the unborn child is also an issue when

dealing with malevolent and envious spirits. In general, male babies are thought to be more desirable than female babies (the stock greeting to a young married woman is "May you bear a son"), so preparing for the birth of a female is sometimes used as a ruse to disinterest the envious spirits. For example, a mother who wants a baby and who has lost many will go out begging from the single women in the village to buy earrings for the baby. In this way, she very publicly prepares for the birth of a girl and hopefully throws the envy of the jinns (and the single women of the village) off the scent of a healthy baby boy. Similarly, after the birth of a boy, a very fearful mother might publicly give the baby a girl's name and dress him in female clothing for a period to ward off misfortune caused by envious influences. These are little dramas put on for the evil spirits which highlight the conceptual discreteness of maleness and femaleness from the earliest moment.

## CHILDHOOD RITUALS

Although the arrival of a girl and the arrival of a boy provoke wildly different public and private responses (the exclamation on the arrival of a boy is, "It is a follower of the Prophet!" and for a girl, "May the mother be well" with no mention of the baby), the actual treatment of brand new babies for the first six weeks is basically the same regardless of sex. This is considered

an extremely dangerous period when the infant could easily be snatched away by illness or malevolent forces. During this vulnerable period, it is thought that the fewer influences the baby is exposed to the better. To make the spine grow straight, the newborn is swaddled in linen like a mummy with only its head unbound. So the baby spends most of its first months with its limbs bound, mostly in a dark room away from activity and stimuli. Although they are vulnerable, babies are not thought to be perceptive or cognizant during this early period. Perhaps because of experience with high infant mortality, Kerkennis are not confident in the vitality of their babies during the first months. In fact, an early death is not treated terribly differently than a late miscarriage. The baby is buried within two or three hours in the local cemetery, but customary visits to the grave on holidays are not made as they would be to the grave of an older child. Condolences all concern the speedy replacement of this infant with another.

## The Forty Day Ceremony

Forty days after the birth there is a kind of social "coming out " party for the infant. It is often very elaborate for a male baby, including his first haircut, first pair of trousers, and first sitting up in a chair. There are many references to his being a little man and to the upcoming circumcision ceremony for which there is

no female equivalent. Formal greetings to male infants at this stage are, "God willing, may you be circumcised." For a female infant they are, "God willing, may you be happily married," for this is the first ritual in a female's life of which she is the focus. Forty day ceremonies for females are much abbreviated, more like a tea party, and very often not observed at all.

This ceremony is called el arba`een, meaning "the fortieth", or el ga`ada, meaning "the sitting" which refers to the first sitting in a chair. A number of factors go into deciding how elaborate a ceremony will be held: is the child a boy, the first boy, the first child, after barrenness or miscarriages? Also, was the success of this pregnancy attributed to the intervention of a saint and was a vow (wa`ada) made to that saint? Of course, financial resources and the extent and presence of a woman's "support group" in the form of close female relatives are also factors. The ceremony is attended exclusively by close female relatives and friends of the mother and small neighborhood children. (It is not clear whether small children are intentionally included in this and other ceremonies because they are ubiquitous). The attending women are those who will be most actively involved in the child's upbringing and also those most likely to be envious. These women are obliged to come to the ceremony to show that they are not envious and the sweets and refreshments are extended partially as an

appeasement offering. The disarming of envy through hospitality is a ritual element employed in all celebrations of good fortune. Little packets of sweets and nuts are delivered by the small children at the party to those relatives and neighbors who might have been expected to attend but did not.

The celebration either takes place at a maraboutic shrine or in the infant's home. The marabout might be the child's namesake, or one with whom the mother or her family has a special relationship through previous interventions. When the guests have gathered, the infant is unbound from the strips of cloth that he has been swaddled in and given an extensive bath by one of the older married relatives of the new mother. The baby is rubbed with olive oil and then dressed for the first time in trousers. This is accompanied by celebratory ululations, you yous, and songs and chants with the child's name included at the appropriate places. Candy is put under a little child's chair to "make it sweet" and the baby is propped up to be able to sit independently. More you yous. A woman's scarf is held over his head by four participants and one of the women pours candy and nuts into it from a grain sifter while chanting a blessing that all good things will rain down on this child in his life. Sometimes the infant is given his first haircut at this time and the hair is enclosed in an amulet which is pinned to his back to ward off

malevolent forces. Refreshments are served and the remaining sweets are delivered around the neighborhood.

Ritually, as far as the infant is concerned, there are three things happening. First, he is being formally introduced to the immediate social world (songs with his name in them) and acknowledged as an independent social being (sitting up in a chair). Second, his maleness is being recognized for the first time in the sex specific clothing, the greetings and blessings concerning his upcoming circumcision, and the haircut. Third, as he enters the dangerous real social world, he is given many layers of protection (the bath, the olive oil, the blessings, and the amulet).

The new mother is also going through a rite of passage in that she is re-entering the community after the dangerous and polluting experience of childbirth. At forty days, she performs a complete ritually prescribed ablution (ghsul) identical to the one she performs after sexual intercourse and after her menstrual period. The purpose of these ablutions is to protect her husband from contamination which would invalidate his prayers. Theoretically, the forty day ceremony coincides with the end of her post-partum bleeding. Not only is she re-entering the social world, she is also re-entering relations with her husband by making herself pure (at least temporarily, which is the most that any woman can achieve). The image of the woman as both vulnerable and

dangerous is symbolically and ritually underlined throughout her life cycle. At the ceremony itself, the mother's success in producing a healthy baby and her resulting elevated status in the community of women is recognized and celebrated.

Although the focal point of the ritual is the baby and periferally, the new mother, it is the community of women who are performing, attending, and ultimately controlling the whole event. This is an important point to make about women's power. While female babies may be ignored ritually and later in life infrequently the center of ritual attention, it is largely females who are organizing and **paying** this attention and this gives them a great deal of power, however oblique.

## Circumcision

Unlike the forty day ceremony, the circumcision ceremony, (tahir) is addressed to the entire immediate community of both sexes. Close relatives from the mainland and other villages as well as the face-to-face community of the village quarter are expected to come and all others are persistently encouraged and welcomed. As in all rites of passage, there is a minimum version of essential elements that must be performed in order for the ritual to be effective. Efficacy is both social and religious. Socially, the family is honorably fulfilling its obligations to the community and religiously (or

culturally), by the submission of the initiand to the prescribed ritual formula, the authority of its meaning is affirmed. Beyond this necessary sequence of events enacted and witnessed by certain necessary categories of people, the ritual can be elaborated almost indefinitely according to the circumstances of the family in question.

There are a number of formats in which a family can conduct a circumcision ceremony effectively with varying degrees of honor conferred on themselves. The most prestigious format is to hold the ceremony as an independent event in one of the larger maraboutic shrines with a number of parties (mezuit) leading up to it. The circumcision can be planned to "piggyback" on a wedding also taking place within the extended family. The logistical advantages of this are that the mainland relatives are all gathered for the wedding and the musicians who are playing at the wedding events can be used for the circumcision as well. This and other understandable economies necessarily reduce the message to the community about the family's expansiveness, a significant theme in all rites of passage. It is common for a family to wait and have a number of brothers or cousins circumcised at the same time. Boys are circumcised anytime after having been weaned at two or three years old up to about the age of eight. Better off families circumcise their children earlier and less well off families put off the expense as long as possible,

although it is generally acknowledged that it is cruel to subject an older child to this operation. Finally, for families which cannot afford a ceremony at all, there is an annual communal circumcision ceremony held during the `Id el Mulid (the birthday of the Prophet) paid for by charitable contributions (zakat) made in the village mosque. The community at large has a good idea of what any family could reasonably afford and in order to claim, maintain, or increase its honorable reputation, the family must satisfy or surpass this unspoken expectation which operates on a very realistic sliding scale. There is no shame in being poor, but there is great shame in being well off and acting poor.

In any of these formats, the basic ritual elements and the sequence of events are the same. The little boy is mounted on a mule, horse, camel, or donkey decorated with brightly colored scarves. He is dressed in a white gown (jebba) and red fez (chechia) which are the traditional clothes an adult male would wear to pray in the mosque. A parade led by at least one and as many as four traditional musicians winds its way through all the pathways of the village. Everyone is encouraged to join the parade. Some do and others wave and cheer and the women you you. The parade makes its way to the marabout where the music continues and the male guests dance in the courtyard building up a very loud and frenzied atmosphere. The mother and close female relatives

are in the room where the saint's tomb is. Other females are serving cakes and soft drinks, watching the men dance, and some of the younger women might dance among themselves on the periphery of the courtyard.

As the music gets louder and faster, the father's brother (or a substitute male relative) dances all around the courtyard holding the little boy on his shoulders. The uncle takes the little boy into a room adjacent to the saint's tomb and he is laid on a new blanket. His legs and arms are held down by the uncle and another male relative (not normally the father). The barber lifts the initiand's gown, says a blessing, and snips off the foreskin with a scissors. The scissors are supplied by the Ministry of Health in an attempt to reduce infections, replacing the knives that had previously been used. At the moment of circumcision, the drums are beaten at a deafening level to indicate to the crowd that the deed has been done, to drown out the cries of the child and perhaps also to distract him. The child is bandaged, wrapped up in the blanket and carried to his mother in the next room where she comforts him. Well wishers, particularly women, look in upon the child and freely lift his clothes to look at his wound. The initiand and his brothers or cousins sleep that night next to the tomb of the saint.

In the more lavish celebrations, a lamb or goat may have been slaughtered earlier in the day and a big

couscous prepared for the honored guests. In all cases, the music and dancing go on into the night. During this period, close male relatives make gifts of money called rmu to the initiand's father. Rmu may come from the classical Arabic word ramma which means to repair or it may be related to the Tunisian rma which refers to the throwing of a fishing spear or net. (Louis 1963:202). In any case, these gifts are used to repair the financial damage to the family budget that the celebration has done. A circumcision can cost several hundred dinars once the new clothes, hiring of the musicians and feeding of the guests are taken into account. Each gift is held up by one of the musicians and one of a number of formulary songs of praise with the amount and the giver's name is sung. These gifts are also written down by a family member for purposes of future reciprocity.

In addition to rescuing the host family, the rmu operates as a kind of savings account for the giver because he can count on his gift being reciprocated at the next rite of passage his immediate family is involved in. This assured resource is very important because otherwise these celebrations would certainly devastate the family's finances, especially if a number of ritual obligations come closely together. Because these contributions are recorded, everyone knows what he can expect and what is expected of him in the future.

The rmu is also a way for alliances between

individuals or dars to be activated or changed. It is expected when the rmu contribution is returned, that it will be significantly increased. Otherwise the debt would be cancelled out and the system of reciprocity brought to a standstill. In fact, repaying the rmu exactly is a cold act and can cause a rift between the parties involved.. Conversely, by vastly exceeding the obligatory contribution or making a contribution when one was not strictly required, the donating dar is making a bid for a closer connection with the receiving dar. There are many possible motivations for such a move: the donating dar may be planning to open marriage negotiations with the receiving dar, cousins maybe realigning themselves in the face of an inheritance dispute, it may be a way of asking for a political favor from a powerful dar, and so on. This forum for ritually and materially making a claim of closeness is especially important given the dispersed character of the community. These major rites of passage are the only recurring, reliable scenario in which the emigrè and island subcommunities come together in large numbers. Consequently, the public statements of loyalty and alignment represented by the rmu payments are an important source of information for the community at large.

Rites of passage are also public statements about the honor (sharaf or `ard) of the host dar. A d a r ' s

honorable reputation is a combination of its material power (qadr), its influence (ktif, literally shoulder), its magnanimity (kram), and its openness (bibanhum mahluhlin "their doors are open"). These are all qualities that the host dar tries to demonstrate in putting on a ritual such as a circumcision ceremony. The community can affirm or undermine the dar's claim to a certain level of honor by the numbers they turn out in. Nadia Abu Zahra, in her book about the Sahel village Sidi Ameur (1982), argues that a family's honorable reputation is a function of making very few visits and receiving many. Although there is certainly a hierarchy of honorable reputation on Kerkennah, as with the rmu contributions, people expect to get as good as they give. Certainly, families with upcoming weddings or circumcisions make a point of attending many village celebrations to insure a good crowd at their own.

In Islamic terms, circumcision is a critical requirement for admission to the Muslim community. To circumcise literally means to purify, tahara. Without being circumcised, a man cannot achieve ritual purity, and without that, none of his religious acts are valid (sih). Ritual purity comes in five stages: purity of intention (niya), of the body from physical dirt, of the members from offenses, of the heart from evil desires, and of the spirit all that is not God. (Encyclopedia of Islam:1934:608). The circumcision is the first step in

the male's lifelong journey toward increasing religious purity and efficacy. Most Kerkennis could articulate this necessary religious purification as the reason for the circumcision.

They also explain it in terms of health and virility, that a man cannot function properly without being circumcised. Many male Kerkennis hold that European women are promiscuous because their uncircumcised men cannot satisfy them. This is not a secular or alternative explanation to the religious one given. It is part of it. God gives men the means to be both clean and virile to protect and hold women, who do not have the same capacity for purity and strength, within the framework of the patriarchial family as it is prescribed in the Our'an.

In strict van Gennepian terms, it is easy to see the stages of separation, transition, and incorporation in this rite of passage. The initiand is being separated from his role as an infant dependant on his mother. This is why little boys are never circumcised before they are weaned. The dangerous transition from one role to another is marked by the journey through the village to the protection of the saint's shrine where he is actually physically altered from an infant into a little man. After the circumcision, his social center of gravity shifts from his mother and her domestic circle and he is incorporated into the world of his male peers. Not until

he goes through the next rite of passage, marriage, does the young male really have a social role again in the domestic unit. Until then, he is more or less banished from the domestic domain and he is relegated to the world of young males where he will constantly be called on to demonstrate his virility, albeit in boyish ways. His presence in the female domain is disturbing because his sexuality has been actively affirmed, unlike his female counterpart whose sexuality has not and must not be acknowledged.

In terms of the female sex role, the absence of ritual, which is a kind of silence, is significant. Upon weaning, which is usually earlier for females than males (twelve to eighteen months as opposed to two or three years), the female child is immediately and easily incorporated into the multigenerational community of women. The transition from being an appendage to the mother to being an appendage to the wider community of girls and women is smooth and takes place without ritual punctuation marks. From the loud recognition of the male's birth, and the forty day ceremony, to the circumcision, the steps and changes in a male's infancy are paid a great deal more attention to and treated with more drama. In their early orientation toward the world, males and females have very different experiences based on the way the "world" responds to them. The smooth and undramatic absorption of the female infant into the

multigenerational domestic world predisposes her toward a less demanding, less assertive, and less autonomous sense of self than her male counterpart. The more dramatic and longer intimacy of the male infant with his mother and the later more pronounced separation from her predisposes him toward a more independent, distinct and demanding sense of self. These differences have implications for adult sex roles including the work styles that were discussed in Chapter Two. The Kerkennis think of these differences in orientation and presentation of the self as being part of the difference between male and female natures, not something that is socially or culturally induced and ritually underlined.

## Mezuit

A mezuit is not strictly a rite of passage like the circumcision or forty day ceremony because it does not always mark a role transition and when it does, the shift in roles is not dramatically symbolized as in other rites of passage. A mezuit is a celebratory party named after the bagpipe made from a goat's stomach that is played at the party. Mezuit music is different from the traditional music played with horns and drums by the specialist musicians at other rituals. A number of young men know how to play the mezuit in every village, but no one plays it as a profession. The music is very loud and repetitive and played in such a way as to encourage

people to dance themselves into a state of frenzied exhaustion.

The most common reasons for holding a mezuit are graduation from high school or university, the return of a relative from abroad, or the achievement of some public honor or award. They all celebrate good fortune and enhanced prestige. Mezuits are also held when friends and relatives are gathered from the mainland for a circumcision or wedding, but before the formal festivites associated with these events have commenced. The mezuit is a socially acceptable way for a family to demonstrate its pride in one of its members. Under normal conditions, expressions of personal pride are considered in bad taste, obnoxious and an insult to God, who alone supplies people with good fortune, talent and intelligence. The host mediates his personal pride by extending hospitality to the community, thereby converting his good fortune into their good fortune. For this reason, it is critical that these parties are presented as open houses for the whole community. Extending hospitality is a redistributive mechanism for counteracting the disparity in circumstances that an individual's good fortune brings about and disarming the attendant evil eye.

Invitations circulate throughout the village during the day of the mezuit with particularly desired guests being pressed repeatedly to come. Sought after guests

include politically powerful men, (kbar, literally, the big ones) and especially returnées from the mainland. Guests start to arrive at ten or eleven at night. Congratulations are extended to the matriculator or father of the boy about to be circumcised or whoever else is the object of celebration. "Akhbar `andik" (may your good fortune surpass mine), is the reply.

These parties are always high spirited and a great deal of energy is devoted to creating a good atmosphere or ambiance (jau). Often quite a bit of palm wine (lagmi) is drunk surreptitiously by some of the men and endless rounds of coffee, tea, and soft drinks are served. A successful mezuit is very loud, goes on until the early hours of the morning, and the guests dance until they drop from exhaustion.

As a rule, these are male parties with largely male celebrants put on for male celebratees. I came upon no instance of a mezuit being held for a female's public accomplishment. As in many segregated activities, however, the sexual boundary is invisible and females are on the periphery preparing refreshments, serving guests, and on the roof tops around the courtyard watching the whole event. These observers are not entirely socially invisible because trays of soft drinks and cakes are sent up to them and the male dancers are clearly aware of their roof top audience. As with the circumcison ritual, mezuits are especially important information

gathering and alliance making occasions because portions of the island and mainland embodiments of the village are physically brought together. Mezuits are also occasions when mothers and potential mothers-in-law can observe and evaluate the pool of marriageable candidates almost as a class. And, of course, the candidates themselves are doing their own reconnaissance.

## MARRIAGE RITUAL

There is no single event in Kerkenni life that provides more excitement, entertainment, and intrigue, or involves so many people and so much cost as the marriage ritual. The summer wedding season is a time when every aspect of normal life is intensified. In some sense, this is the pivotal rite of passage that the others anticipate or lead away from. To use van Gennep's term, it is also the most "systemic" in the sense that with the central passage of the bride and groom into new statuses, a number of other dependent status shifts take place in the wider social system. This is true of other rites of passage, but not to such a great degree. The summer wedding season is also the time when the largest number of mainland Kerkennis come back for long visits, sometimes swelling the population to double its normal size. For these reasons, this ritual will be analyzed in particular detail.

First, a brief chronological overview: the Kerkenni marriage ritual has four major phases. The first phase is private and involves only the immediate families of the future bride and groom,. During this stage, the bride and groom are kept completely in the background and have no active role in the proceedings, they are being represented by their respective families. This phase culminates in an agreement in principle to marry and

preparations for a formal and public engagement. The approaches and negotiations involved in this initial phase require great delicacy and are sometimes spread over a period of several months.

The second phase involves the entire community and consists of the formal engagement and the first official marriage prestations. This is the first and only time until the marriage is consummated that the bride and groom are seen together formally in public. This is a legal step and from this point on, the honor of the two families is mutually dependent. The second and third phases can follow in quick succession or they can be separated by as many as three or four years.

The third phase consists of the actual wedding celebration, which is a dense and intricate sequence of events. Over the last thirty years, it has been reduced from a six day to a three day celebration. All of the events and personnel in this phase are divided into two "camps": the bride's and the groom's. As the sequence proceeds, the two groups interact more and more intensely until they finally merge on the night of consummation. During this period, the groom is very conspicuous, while the bride is heavily protected. This phase begins with the completion of the legal contract, marrying the couple in the eyes of God and the government. But the community does not consider the marriage valid until at least three days later when the bride is transferred publicly to her

husband's patrilineal home and the marriage is physically consummated.

The final phase is also public, but the focus narrows once again to the immediate families. It begins with confirmation of the consummation and the groom's acceptance of the bride and ends seven days later with the bride's visit as an outsider to her father's house. It is during this week for the first time that the bride is very much in the public spotlight.

To summarize the marriage ritual in terms of role symbolism, when a man marries, he is ritually reintegrated into the domestic work which he left when he was circumcised as a small boy. As discussed above, the circumcision is a ritual recognition of his male sexual identity and with this comes the dramatization of a set of rules concerning manliness. During this sexually "liminal" period of childhood and adolescence, the male has no social role in the domestic routine. At marriage, his sexuality is literally domesticated and he is readmitted into the world of women. He now holds the office of the head of his own nuclear unit which is at least potentially autonomous. His presence now represents protection and not a threat.

Upon his marriage, the groom is also admitted for the first time into the fuller social and political forum of adult men. A man is not considered stable, trustworthy and serious (balug), and therefore worth listening to,

until he has domestic responsibilities. The weight of these responsibilities is fully acted out during the ceremony and the forum of elders is there to witness it.

The role symbolism of a girl's marriage is analogous to a boy's circumcision: it is the legitimation and public recognition of her sexual identity. As a virgin, she was protected and "covered" by her family. At her marriage, she is "uncovered" by her family and she is ritually instructed in the art of lovemaking. Her sexuality now becomes part of her social identity and she is given new mobility in which to demonstrate her womanliness. Like the little boy after circumcision, she is now freed from the intense protection of the domestic domain.

The wedding ritual also dramatizes a shift in focus from the maiden's purity to the woman's fertility. According to the Kerkenni ideology, the sole reason for marriage is the bearing and raising of children. It is this fact which assuages the sexual shame (hishma) between a husband and a wife. However, it is also the fact of this active sexual bond which injects an intense element of shame and modesty into the relationship of the bride and her own father. He must abandon his role as her domestic protector. This is one of the many systemic repercussions of this rite of passage. The ritual avoidance of the father and daughter required by this new element of shame helps the bride to demonstratively shift

her attention and her loyalty to her husband's family.

For the groom, marriage presents the new role of domestic protector and genitor and responsible public presence. For the bride, marriage affirms her new sexuality, her fertility, and her future primary identification with her husband's immediate family. For both the bride and groom, the marriage ritual demonstrates that their new roles are defined by the wider society. The ritual also demonstrates that the bride and groom now occupy positions that are indispensable to the overall system; and furthermore, that these positions have a formal reality that is distinguishable from the individuals who fill these positions. On one level, the marriage celebration is an inauguration to corporate offices to which the autonomous personalities of the bride and groom are not relevant.

We turn now to the ethnography of the wedding procedure. Figure 4 shows the different phases and the component events of each phase of the wedding ritual. It is universally assumed that all normal young men and women will marry, so there is always an evaluation going on of who the possible partners might be. When a young man reaches his early twenties and, either independently or at the urging of his family, decides that it is time to marry, his mother and sisters advise him and comment on his opinion of the possible girls. The chief criteria

PHASE ONE: Private/Families
khotba: proposal of marriage from groom's family to bride's family.
shorta: acceptance of proposal "upon conditions."

PHASE TWO: Public/Community
mlak: formal engagement, annoucement in the village, and display of gifts.
mezuit: celebratory men's party.

PHASE THREE: Public/Community
urud: announcement of the begining of the wedding throughout the village.
sdaq: signing of the legal contract of marriage at the mayor's office.
kuffa: bridal party where bride reaches into a basket of personal items to augur an auspicious marriage. Display of trousseau.
`ars: men's wedding party similar to a mezuit.
er rahiya: grain grinding by the groom's group.
leilet el henna: beautification party for the bride.
`ars: men's wedding party.
hattaba: collection of wood by groom's group for bridal throne.
heroub: formal party of recent brides.
ars: men's wedding party
nhar el jeffa: building of bridal throne by groom's group.
jelwa el arousa: departure of bride from her father's house, transfer in or behind the jeffa, and arrival at her groom's father's house.
leilet es soff: parade of groom accompanied by recent grooms through village. Party with rshiqa contributions.

PHASE FOUR: Private/Families
dkhul: entrance of groom into the bridal chamber.
nhar es sbah: groom's acceptance of bride and confirmation of her virginity.
usbua': seven days of rest and visiting, maraboutic visit.
hishma: visit of bride and groom to the bride's father's house.

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Figure 4. Phases and component events of marriage ritual.

Note: These are the critical elements of the marriage ritual, although sometimes the sequence varies slightly and not all families still perform the rahiya and the hattaba.

for starting marriage plans is having clear economic prospects. This means the young man will have completed his education, and/or have a job on the mainland, or be established as a fisherman with his father, or have a plan to work abroad. In other words, he now has the means to eventually accumulate enough money to make an honorable marriage and therefore to be considered a reasonable risk by the girl's family. Traditionally, the mother is her son's confidante and has a great deal of influence in choosing a bride because she will be spending more time with the bride than anyone else, including her son. If there is a difference of opinion, the matter is usually put aside because it is not possible to proceed until some kind of family consensus has been reached. Over the last generation, the mother has lost some influence in this matter and the son has gained some, but even today, it would be very rare for a son to choose a bride against his family's wishes, not least because he needs his family's financial assistance to make an honorable offer to his desired mate and her family. There are also many long-term implications for the future in violating the family's wishes that few young men would want to confront. This is a stable example of the extent to which the son's identity continues to be embedded in the larger identity and interests of his family despite the economic and social changes that Kerkennah has undergone.

When a candidate has been agreed upon, the father or uncle of the young man approaches the father or some close male relative of the girl in a public place, perhaps in the mosque or cafe, and obliquely inquires as to the marital situation of the girl, mentioning that the young man's family has admired her as an honorable girl. This approach is done discreetly in a public place because paradoxically, a private meeting in the home of the girl would be less likely to be private given the degree to which the village quarter keeps track of such things. The hesitant and oblique nature of this inquiry is necessary to avoid the humiliating situation of a direct refusal which would put the two families at odds. The girl's relative says something either encouraging or discouraging. This oblique approach is sometimes repeated three or four times while the girl and her family make up their minds whether to entertain a proposal from this family. When an affirmative message has been clearly conveyed, a delegation from the groom's family, excluding the groom, visits the bride's family and a formal proposal of marriage is made, always with the same words, "We have come to ask for your daughter, who is virtuous and of a good lineage." The answer is, "In the name of Allah, it is done if you accept the conditions." This is called the khotba.

Soon afterwards, at another meeting at the girl's father's house, the brideprice and trousseau are

discussed and an agreement in principle to marry is made. This event is called the shorta, meaning to make an agreement on conditions. The shorta functions as a reservation on the girl. It is not a legal agreement, however, and if the fiancé does not make his good faith clear through frequent gifts and avoiding unnecessary delays in moving toward the engagement, the girl's family may honorably start to entertain other offers.

Throughout this sequence of approach, proposal, and agreement, the personalities and wishes of the two principals are submerged in the general idiom of the family and the roles of the other family members. The potential mothers-in-law are particularly highlighted at this time.

Normally, a period of several months or a year or even years passes before the formal engagement which inaugurates the second phase of the marriage. This period depends on resources, the time of year the proposal was made, and the resolve or eagerness of the parties involved. A week or two before the engagement party, a small group of the groom's female relatives go to Sfax to purchase clothing, an engagement ring, lingerie, perfume, and other gifts for the bride which will be added to the trousseau that she has been accumulating herself. These purchases are all very narrowly prescribed. There is no way to tell one girl's trousseau from another's except by the quantities of the

prescribed items. The items are prescribed by fashion as well as by tradition. One of the recently added required items is a Moroccan tourist dress with a hooded cape.

Late on the afternoon of the day of engagement, which is called mlak, meaning to take possession, the groom's extended family, male and female, leads a parade through the village carrying boxes and baskets of gifts over their heads. The parade snakes through the village, picking up followers en route until they finally arrive at the bride's house. This parade is the first public announcement of the match, although the unofficial word has probably gotten around before this. This parade is similar in character to the circumcision parade: the same musicians and music and appeal to the community to follow along.

In the courtyard of the girl's house, the gifts are held up one by one by the chief musician who acts as a master of ceremonies and is called the warrash. The crowd cheers and the women make their characteristic cry of joy, the you you. At this time, the young man presents his fiancée with an engagement ring. Earlier, the gifts would have been presented and received by the future mothers-in-law. The engagement ring, the girl's dress, and a specially decorated cake are European touches that have been piled on top of the traditional engagement without having much impact on its structure, but adding greatly to the expense and excitement of the

event. After all the presentations are made, the crowd disperses and the groom's camp reconvenes that night for a mezuit.

Between the mlak and the actual wedding, the behavior of the fiancés is very closely invigilated by the community and all visits of the young man to his fiancée's house are heavily chaperoned. Even today when relations between men and women have relaxed somewhat, this period requires a special degree of modesty. This is because the girl's purity must be manifestly apparent and unquestioned while the young man, whose virility is equally apparent, is assumed to be naturally impatient.

Finally, months or even years after the formal engagement, the actual wedding celebration begins, initiating the third phase. On the first day, a child goes out through the village announcing the beginning of the wedding at every corner. It is essential that everyone in the village feels invited and that no one is excluded. Offense is taken by those who thought they were not invited and offense is taken by those giving the wedding if they think someone is purposefully neglecting to come. The coherence of the village is dramatized by the very careful inclusion of village deviants, people with mental and physical disabilities, and old people who have no families. Insane people are especially welcome for it is thought that Allah speaks directly to them and they bring blessing.

On the afternoon of this first day, the bridal party goes by appointment to the mayor's office and the legal contract of marriage is signed. The bride is almost completely covered in a white shroud (safsari) and she speaks only once to answer "yes," although her family witness can answer for her if she is too overcome with modesty. Once the contract is signed, the couple is legally and religiously married. It is noteworthy that this is the only explicitly Islamic component of the whole wedding sequence. The rest of the ritual is customary rather than doctrinal. The couple now has the right to cohabit, although they do not exercise this right because the community has not yet witnessed the role transformations that are equally important in completing the ritual. At this event, the bridal modesty and purity are given an exaggerated expression because the contract depends on her virginity and because her transformation from a girl into a woman now begins.

After the contract is signed, the first event is the "kuffa" or basket. A parade of gifts, much like the engagement parade, winds its way through the village to the bride's house. Once again the gifts are displayed one by one. The longer the display lasts, the greater is the demonstration of the groom's material power (qadr) and his high opinion of the bride. Special marriage songs about the virtue and beauty of the bride are sung. Then a basket, the lips of which are sewn together, is

presented to the bride by the village midwife (qabbla). (In spite of the symbolism of labial infibulation, I found no evidence of this kind of surgery in the present or at any time in the past.) A small opening is made and the bride thrusts her hand in to take out a little packet. The basket is filled with little packets containing a mirror, needles, perfume, kohl, raisins, henna, cosmetics, a piece of charcoal, and some sugar. What she draws out will symbolically characterize her marriage so the women in the crowd yell out, "Take sugar! Take sugar!" Hopefully, the midwife has arranged the packets so that she will reach for the sugar and not the charcoal or salt which presage a bitter or fruitless marriage. This basket ceremony is the first reference to the bride's sexuality. The success of the marriage will depend on the sexual resources, the basket, and she is assisted now, as she will certainly be in the future, by the midwife in pulling something good out of her "basket".

Among the gifts at this event, are numerous beauty products which the bride will be using for the first time on the night of consummation. She has not been allowed to use these products or to wear her long hair loose before this because the embellishment makes her sexually desirable, thoughts she must avoid provoking as a maiden. It is important, of course, that these beauty products come from her future husband for he is inviting her to

reveal her desirability.

This event usually takes place in the afternoon. the crowd disperses and the groom's group and the musicians go back to his house for music and dancing that goes on until the small hours of the morning. The groom is distinctly sloppy and unshaven and becomes worse over the course of the next few days. This is to discourage any envious powers in the atmosphere from seizing on him. This is the same reason that otherwise exacting housewives allow their little sons to wear rags and to remain filthy when they are in the public eye. This practice accords well with George Foster's argument that peasant societies operate on a principle of "limited good" and that good fortune should therefore be disguised. (Foster 1965).

At this party, called an `ars, which is also the general term for wedding, the women associated with the groom's camp are observing from the roof of the house and the men are seated in the courtyard where they are served refreshments by the groom. All of the young men dance. As the night wears on and the music gets more frantic, the dance motions become more and more sexually explicit with one of the men dressed in a woman's overskirt taking the female sexual role.

Max Gluckman discusses transvestism in rites of passage among the Zulu and Tsonga of as a form of ritual rebellion ultimately serving the function of reinforcing

established sex roles and especially the authority of the male sex. (1962:5). Transvestite dancing appears in both the male and female wedding parties on Kerkennah. There is an "anti-structure" (to use Victor Turner's term) release of energy in these dances not just in the role reversals of transvestism, but also in the sexual explicitness of the dances. I would argue that rather than simply reinforcing the established sex roles and their structural relations to each other, they highlight the power of sexuality itself. In an indirect way, this is a recognition of the power of women. The local ideology (found widely in North Africa cf.Dwyer 1978, Davis 1983) is that women are wildly sexual and that they have the power to ruin a man and this is why men must control institutions to domesticate women. The wedding ritual at many levels recognizes the power of women and the centrality of the domestic sphere.

The re-entry of the groom into the world of women is signalled at several levels in this situation: by the men on the inside and the women on the outside, by the groom's serving of the guests which is traditionally a female activity, by the groom's need for protection from the evil eye which is traditionally a concern of mothers for their baby sons, and the transvestism in dance.

On the following morning, a group of young women associated with the groom meet in his courtyard and grind grain (el rahiya) for the wedding feast. Their work area

is cut off by a piece of string. If the groom invades this area and breaks this string during their work, he must pay a forfeit of cooking and serving them tea. This is another example of the symbolic entrance of the male into the female domain as well as defining the domains of the sexual division of labor.

Another party of music and dancing identical in structure to the one on the preceeding night is again put on at the groom's house. One way to show solidarity with the groom and his domestic group is to attend all of the long and exhausting, although entertaining, nightime celebrations.

While this party is taking place, the bride and her female friends and relatives are having a henna party. In private, a married relative of the bride completely depiliates the bride's body. Then a henna specialist (hennana) draws stylized designs including fertility symbols such as fish and palm trees on the bride's hands and feet with melted wax and then applies the henna which will dye the skin of her hands and feet dark red. The wax is then peeled off, leaving a white design against the red background. The specialist places a lighted candle in the middle of the plate of henna and a little girl holds the plate over the head of the bride. If the candle goes out during this procedure, it is thought that the bride will quickly exhaust the vitality of her husband. Once again, it is suggested that it is the

bride who maintains the health and vitality of the marriage.

The leftover henna, which carries a blessing, as well as being beautifying, is used by the girls in the party. These girls are making a blessing on the marriage and supporting their "sister" by sharing the henna. Some of this henna is sometimes applied to one half of the groom's left hand as well. This is the only time in his life that a man would ever use this manifestly female cosmetic. He is calling on the purifying aspect of the henna to prepare him for his entry into the bridal domain and there is a suggestion of this touch of feminine symbolism domesticating him.

On the next morning, the groom's male friends and relatives decorate a camel and some donkeys with jewelry and women's headscarves. They go to the bush to collect firewood for the preparation of the wedding feast and the bridal throne (jeffa). Like the serving of refreshments, collecting wood is exclusively a female activity in everyday life. This event is called the hattaba.

On this night, the groom's family gives another party as on the previous two nights, all of which are caled el `ars. At this time, the bride's female friends and relatives are attending a party at her house called the "heroub" literally, flight or liberation, but actually meaning something closer to departure. The courtyard of her house is decorated with bright flags and carpets.

The bride is seated on a pillow crosslegged in a traditional Kerkenni wedding dress which is red on the left and green on the right. She is completely veiled with red and gold scarves and can see nothing. On both sides of the bride are a row of recently married women also wearing their traditional wedding dresses and their wedding headdresses. They are not veiled. The audience, which is made up entirely of women, girls, and young children, faces this row of brides. Seated in front of the new bride are two female musicians who warm their instruments and burn incense over a small charcoal fire. Female music and songs are totally different from the male variety as are their dance movements. Women dance with a continuous rolling of the hips whereas men dance with abrupt thrusts, reminding one of contrasting movements in sexual intercourse. While the bride is still veiled and can see nothing, a young woman taking the female part and an old woman taking the male part get up and do a dance explicitly representing the sex act, just as two males have done at the `ars. As well as being a dramatization and celebration of sexuality, this procedure particularly stresses the fact that the bride is still in a state of sexual ignorance. After an hour or two of music and singing, the two "former" brides on the new bride's left and right lift her veil and with her eyes still closed, she turns her head to the left and then to the right and then opens her eyes and gazes

straight ahead. This literal and symbolic eye opening, a classic example of a ritual rebirth in van Gennep's sense, is greeted with a long cry of joy from the women in the audience. The music continues late into the night and the married women close to the bride, although not the chorus of recent brides, dance for the entertainment of the crowd. While all this is taking place, the bride stares straight ahead and does not speak. The formal and corporate aspect of her new role is underlined by this somber mannequin-like behavior and by her being placed in a row of people whose roles are exactly what hers will be and who are dressed exactly as she is. The bride's passivity and silence dramatizes the female ideal analyzed earlier in the discussion of "the word." It also marks her own liminality being neither girl nor woman and perhaps expresses some real sadness at leaving home. The heroub party is a good example of a ritual acknowledging and dramatizing the tension between the poles of structure (passivity) and anti-structure (sexuality) which Turner argues exist in every social role. (1969:166-7).

On the final day (nhar el jeffa) of this third phase of the wedding ritual, the groom's kin gather to build a bridal throne from the wood that was collected a couple days earlier. This throne is actually a box which is decorated with a bridal tapestry (tarf) embroidered by a specialist with exclusive Kerkenni designs. The box is

tied on top of a camel or failing that, a mule drawn cart. The groom's group prepares to fetch the bride. The groom is barbered in the company of his friends who dance in front of him, once again in a very erotic fashion, but this time to female music played by a female specialist. A large parade with full male musical accompaniment leads the empty throne to the bride's house.

At the bride's house, the bride is dressed as she was at the heroub party the night before and she is surrounded by her weeping female relatives. Although there is such a thing as ritualized weeping on demand on Kerkennah, there is also very real sadness at this moment of departure. Even if the bride is only moving into a neighboring house with her patrilineal relatives, she is still losing her familiar routine and her constant contact with her mother and sisters. The bride and a group of her friends take hands and walk around her house seven times counterclockwise almost as if the bride were unwinding or disentangling herself from her parental home. When the parade of the groom's group arrives, her father covers her with his white cloak (burnous) and places her in the bridal throne. Theoretically, no one outside of this house has seen her. Traditionally, she would be hoisted into the decorated box on top of the camel or cart but nowadays, the box is usually filled with young children and the bride is transferred in a

closed car decorated with baloons. The bride's family stays behind weeping and does not attend any more of the festivities.

The parade, el jelwa, then makes its way back to the groom's paternal home and the bride disembarks. The groom's mother is dancing for joy at the doorway of the courtyard and welcomes her in. The groom's mother is the most radically affected by the marriage next to the bride and groom themselves. In status terms, she takes a giant step up because her domestic authority is now enhanced by the subordinate position of her new daughter-in-law. In purely practical terms, her work load is greatly reduced and this is reason enough to dance for joy. If she knows and likes the bride, she also has a life-long companion who in many ways will become closer than her own daughters.

The bride is lead directly to her pristine bridal chamber and before she enters, an egg is thrown and broken against the lintel. The breaking of the egg represents the impending loss of her virginity and its transformation into fertility. The breaking of the egg is also a prophylactic against the evil eye.

There are many variations of this ritual element throughout North Africa and the Middle East. Shelagh Weir reports that in Palestine yeast is smeared on the lintel (personal communication). Even more dramatic is the custom in Sidi Ameur reported by Abu Zahra, "When the

bride crosses the threshold of her husband's house, a cock is slaughtered between her legs, and its blood is made to flow between her legs to symbolize her virginity" (1982:132). In southern Tunisia, the egg to be broken on the lintel is dyed with henna or saffron (Louis 1963:2:158 and Valensi 1977:175). In the Augila Oasis of Libya, the egg is broken over the lintel just before the bride's virginity is confirmed rather than when she enters the room (Mason 1977). Marcais (1925:304-5) and Pacques (1964) also report North African instances of this egg breaking custom.

The egg is a complex symbol. It looks like an eye and the breaking of it is meant to "break" the gaze of the evil eye. It is also associated with sexuality. Kerkenni mothers think that feeding a young boy too many eggs will make him run wild. The breaking of the egg unleashes the bride's sexuality. There is the obvious connection with animal, human, and agricultural fertility. It is the symbolic holiday food of the New Year celebration, meant to augur bountiful harvests. In the wedding context, the egg means all of these things: sexuality, fertility, the cohesiveness of the marriage, and the evil eye. The multiple voices of a symbol like this is not unusual or contradictory. Olive oil, eggs, fish and bread are "recycled" as symbols partly because they are the valued things that people have in this simple economy. But it is also the case that the

coincidence of meanings , rather than cancelling each other out, actually contribute to the density of meaning, which is the essence of all ritual.

Night falls and the groom, now beautifully dressed and coiffeured, is lead through the village by a group of recent grooms who are also beautifully turned out, mirroring the chorus of recent brides at the heroub party. The foremost among these friends, called the wazir (literally, minister), holds a chair over the groom's head during the tour to protect him from envy or malevolent forces on this crucial night. The wazir is also responsible for advising the groom on how to deflower the bride (Laurence Michelak, personal communication). He is the male equivalent of the henna specialist who beautifies and advises the bride. When he arrives back at his father's house, his bride is seated, unveiled but with a wedding headress on, in the doorway of the bridal chamber. The groom is seated on the far side of the courtyard directly facing her. This is the first time he has seen her since the contract was signed. Both he and the bride maintain total silence and motionless postures throughout this event which lasts at least two hours. Once again, he is as an empty shell filling a place in a procedure, a place that could have been filled by any of the guard of grooms who are supporting him.

At this time, it is particularly important for the

village men of all ages and especially those of great influence to make an appearance. They are recognizing the new position of the young man and offering him membership in their wider society. Up until the time of marriage, the young man is considered frivolous and selfish and not worth listening to and he must make a point of avoiding older men. He will now be treated seriously by the community of adult males. This event also includes reimbursible contributions called rshiqa similar to the rmu contributions described in the account of the circumcision ritual with all of the same long-term implications.

The music stops and the groom is lead away by his wazir to be prepared for the consummation. The bride is blessed and wished well by the females present. The crowd leaves and the couple is left alone in their bridal chamber. When they take their shoes off, they step on each others' feet to determine who will rule the new household. The groom wins. Sometimes the bride has left an open padlock under the bed to make her sexually receptive. The question of sexual success is addressed to her. If the marriage is not consummated right away, it is because she was scared or nervous or like a closed padlock. (Pamela Johnson tells of pregnant women being "locked" around the waist with a string and a padlock to prevent miscarriages in a zawiya in Tunis [1979:9]). Ideologically, it is assumed that the groom will be able

to perform sexually and that the sexual test both of virginity and receptivity is of the bride. Behind this brave ideology, there is considerable male anxiety illustrated by the large number of impotent groom jokes and stories. With the consummation, the marriage is legalized according to custom. While the marriage is now socially established, it is still not considered "complete" until a son has been born.

The fourth and final phase of the ritual begins at dawn the next day when the groom rises and pays a visit to the bride's parents. He drinks tea with them and thanks them for their daughter. In other words, he is testifying to her virginity. If this visit does not take place, it is expected that the bride will be sent back to her father and the marriage annulled. It sometimes happens that the groom will keep the bride even if she is not a virgin, although with an adjustment to the bridewealth. If it were he who deflowered her before the wedding, honor requires him to go through a charade of the confirmation of her virginity. With this confirmation, all of the presents the groom has given to the bride are transferred to her new home, another step in the shifting of her identity and loyalty.

Throughout this day, called nhar es sbah, the bride receives visitors and well wishers and her behavior is distinctly animated in contrast to the previous days. She changes clothes every half hour or so, demonstrating

her new wardrobe. In the afternoon, a final party with female musicians and music but no dancing is given in her honor in her new house. This is called the sbah, meaning morning; it is also a euphemism referring to virginity. It is attended by the women of the community and it is their affirmation of her sexual success and her new role. This party ends with the wishes that she may quickly become pregnant with a son. On this evening, the frame from her bridal throne is placed on the roof over the bridal chamber. It will be taken down on the day she bears her first son and used for firewood to cook a fruit drink that is thought to stimulate her mother's milk. This is an example of the way in which this rite of passage is linked in an anticipatory manner to the next one, just as the circumcision anticipates the boy's wedding.

During the following week, the bride does no work. She and her husband and his family may make a visit to a local saint's shrine. This visit has the character of a summer holiday. The choice of shrines is made by the bride's mother-in-law who normally favors the saint she appealed to when asking to become pregnant with the son who has just married . It is likely that a second generation wa`ada (conditional vow) to the saint will be made at this time. She clearly hopes that this precedent will be effective for her new daughter-in-law.

Finally, the wedding ritual ends seven days after the

consummation with a visit of the bridal couple to the house of the bride's father called el hishma, meaning modesty or sexual shame. The bride is not allowed to visit her parents during this first week and is expected to avoid them in general during the first months of her marriage. This is to prove to her in-laws, especially her mother-in-law, her willingness to commit herself wholeheartedly to their household. It is understood that the bride will be homesick and it is thought best for her to make a sharp break at least in the early days. This visit is usually very short and formal. This symbolic statement of the shift in the bride's loyalty and identity is emphasized because she does, in fact, still have a strong tie to her natal family which can be a threat to the new marriage. It is also recognized that she will turn to her own family for protection in times of marital difficulty.

This is only one of many reasons that Kerkennis give for their strong commitment to marrying cousins as discussed in Chapter One. A woman should not be far from her brothers in case her husband does not take good care of her. It is thought that there is less danger of marital discord if the partners come from related families. "You know what you are getting." The economic interests of the two families are often served by a close marriage in reducing the parcelling of land discussed in Chapter Two and in fostering cooperation in traditional

and modern enterprises. Marriage strategies are consistent with the risk-avoiding and risk-spreading practices that characterize the Kerkennah family economy in general. A marriage is an alliance between two families that will surely result in new opportunities and a rearrangement of the order in which favors are distributed. "We want to mix our grain with our olive oil" (zitna fi dqiqna), say the Kerkennis about marrying to mix the different strengths of the family together. This is true for mainland Kerkennis as well, who also try to marry "close" whether it be within the dispersed or island embodiment of the village to which they are attached.

One of the major effects of the marriage ritual is to unify, if only temporarily, the two embodiments of the village. This process of unification works in both directions. The wedding season is a massive reunion that takes place at the village level. With the great summer invasion of mainland members, the village, which faces depopulation and economic decline during the rest of the year, overflows with vitality. It gains strength through actual numbers, through association with the success of its mainland kin, and not least, through the huge circulation of money and goods involved in the wedding ritual. The marriage ritual presents the village with a variety of mechanisms for embracing the mainland members and minimizing the financial, social, temporal and

geographical distinctions that have separated them.

Looking at it from the opposite direction, mainland village members believe that there is no way to belong to any group as thoroughly and as securely as they belong to their place of origin. All other associations follow from, or are somehow influenced by, this identification. The village is the social unit at which economic, political, and social networks of influence are generated. It is very important for mainland residents to renew their membership in the village and the most intense and efficient way of doing this is by actively participating in the wedding season.

Even if the bride's and groom's families both live in Sfax, they come back to their Kerkenni village for the mlak parade of gifts and the public announcement of the engagement. The idea of doing this in Sfax would be regarded as preposterous because it would entail announcing the engagement to a group of "strangers." They are "strangers" because they do not form a social frame of reference or an economic support group like the village.

In addition to its central symbolic functions, the wedding season serves as a clearing house for many kinds of information. As with the announcement of the engagement, the village is considered the appropriate sounding board for this information. We noted earlier the wedding season as an opportunity for information

gathering about future marriage candidates. It also serves as a clearing house for more general kinds of information. There are specific mechanisms within the marriage ritual to facilitate this. Through these mechanisms people make clear what their achievements and assets are and what kinds of moves they hope to make in the coming year. The community digests this information and makes adjustments in its groupings, ranking and countermoves.

Throughout all of the events in the third phase, networks of cooperation are constantly being exercised because there is an enormous amount of cleaning, cooking, and transporting to be done, not to mention the lending of furniture, food, and other goods. People can make a strong statement about their intra-village networks by the degree of their participation not only in the actual marriage ritual, but also in the preparations for the ritual. Equally, these opportunities for cooperation are also opportunities for display of material power (qadr). Figure 5 shows the circulation of food, money, jewelry, clothing, furniture, and other gifts (excluding the groom's main gifts of gold and household furnishings) throughout the marriage ritual. The sequence, magnitude, and velocity of these exchanges are all part of the integrating intensity of the marriage ritual which focuses people's attention so sharply.

| EVENT | GOOD | FROM | TO |
|---|---|---|---|
| khotba | 1.hospitality | bride's fam. | groom's rel. |
| | 2.sweets and fruit | groom's rel. | bride's fam. |
| | 3.part of #2 returned | bride's fam. | groom's rel. |
| shorta | 4.meal | bride's fam. | groom's fam. |
| mlak | 5.engagement ring, clothing, sweets | groom | bride |
| | 6.stores of oil, grain, fruits | groom | bride's fam. |
| | 7.occasional gifts watch, clothing, during `ids | groom | bride & sisters |
| mezuit | 8.food & lagmi | groom's fam. | musicians & honored guests |
| | 9.drinks & cakes | groom's fam. | women, children, & guests |
| | 10.money | guests | musicians |
| sdaq | 11.soft drinks | bride's fam. | crowd |
| | 12.couscous w/ freshly slaughtered lamb | groom's fam. | notaries & honored guests |
| kuffa | 13.wheat, oil, sugar, staples | groom's fam. | bride's m. |
| | 14.part of #13 returned | bride's m. | groom's m. |
| | 15.basket of beauty products & sweets | groom | bride |
| | 16.money | bride's fam. | midwife |
| | 17.money | guests | musicians |
| | 18.drinks & cakes | bride's fam. | guests |

Figure 5. Circulation of goods during the marriage ritual.

Note: This summary excludes the major features of the bridewealth and trousseau that are agreed upon at the shorta.

| EVENT | GOOD | FROM | TO |
|---|---|---|---|
| rahiya | 19.grain | groom's fam. & rel. | groom's fam. |
| | 20.tea & food | groom | groom's female rel. |
| | 21.division of #14 | groom's m. | female rel. grinding grain |
| henna | 22.henna in kuffa #15 | groom | bride |
| | 23.money | bride | hennana |
| | 24.drinks & cakes | bride's fam. | bride's female rel. & friends |
| hattaba | 25.money to rent camels | groom | camel owners |
| | 26.scarves & jewelry lent to decorate camels | groom's female rel. | groom |
| | 27.couscous w/ meat | groom's fam. | male friends & musicians |
| | 28.money | male friends | musicians |
| heroub | 29.carpets,chairs, decorations borrowed | neighbors | bride's fam. |
| | 30.drinks & cakes | bride's fam. | guests |
| | 31.money | guests | musicians |
| jeffa | 32.couscous w/ meat | groom's fam. | jeffa builders |
| soff | 33.rshiqa contributions | groom's rel. & friends | groom |
| | 34.money | guests | musicians |
| | 35.drinks & cakes | groom's fam. | guests |
| dkhul | 36.small jewel for removing veil | groom | bride |
| hishma | 37.meal with large fish | bride's fam. | bride & groom |

Figure 5.(con't.) Circulation of goods during the marriage ritual.

The public display and even inventory of the gifts and the trousseau at the mlak and at several stages of the wedding ritual contain important information about the bride and the groom and their families. The amount of the bridewealth is a statement about the status of the bride's family's and its ability to demand and receive a certain price. The trousseau, the gifts, and the luxuriousness of the furnishing of the bridal chamber are a statement about the economic prospects of the groom and the kind of material support he can call up from his family and friends. It is a kind of credit rating.

The rshiqa or rmu contributions at the men's parties are statements about the material power of the contributors and the degree of their attachment to the groom's family. They are also an opportunity for the contributor's reputation, activities and even foibles to be publicly displayed and played with in the songs of "praise" that announce the contributions.

At all of the wedding parties, as in all occasions of hospitality, a lot of public ranking and evaluating gets done by the order people are seated in, the amount and quality of the food they are served, the kind of clothes they wear, and how extensively they are greeted.

In addition to the intense circulation of information about village individuals and families, the wedding ritual is also an intense immersion in village and island symbolism. This source of Kerkenni "self-esteem" pulls

the mainland Kerkennis closer to home. Local identity is symbolized in the distinctive bridal costume and jewelry, the exclusive Kerkenni designs on the hennaed hands and feet of the bride and the embroidered symbols on the bridal tapestry. The musicians also wear costumes seen only on Kerkennah and they play a distinctive Kerkenni music including songs about Kerkenni saints and heroes. Island identity is no less aroused by the derogatory songs about Sfax.

Two major changes have taken place in the Kerkenni wedding ritual over the last thirty years. One is that the marriage season has shifted from March - April to July - August. In general, it used to be held in the spring after the winter wheat harvest, which occupied the women, and before the late spring fishing expeditions, which occupied the men and took them away. However, there was not something thought of as "the wedding season" as there is now and it was not uncommon for weddings to take place at other times of the year. Weddings now take place during the summer so that mainland and European residents of Kerkenni origin can join in the festivities and have them overlap with their summer holidays. A wedding outside of this season would be viewed with raised eyebrows. The second major change is a quantum jump in the funds required to for a young man to make an honorable match. The first change has abbreviated the number of days the actual ritual

procedure takes because of timing constraints and the second change has stretched out the whole process over several years, delaying the actual age of marriage, while sufficient funds are accumulated.

The marriage of a son is the biggest economic hurdle the family confronts in its lifecycle. In 1978, when the annual per capita income in Tunisia was less than $1000, the expense to the groom and his family, excluding the cost of incidental hospitality, was between $3,000-$5,000. It could easily be twice this amount if a new residence were involved. This kind of disproportionate expense exists all over Tunisia and the government has tried a number of measures to bring things more into line with people's incomes including an enormous tax on gold jewelry, the major form the bridewealth takes, and a restriction on the actual payment to the bride's father. These measures have only served to complicate the question of the bridewealth and trousseau, not reduce their importance or expense. Islamic customary law requires that a marriage be validated by a payment to the bride's family, both to compensate them for the loss of her labor and as insurance for her in the case of divorce. In 1957, the Personal Status Code outlawed polygamy, divorce by repudiation, gave women the right to inheritance, as well as alimony and child support in the case of divorce. These measures were designed to have the same protective function as the bridewealth, and to

make it unnecessary. Consequently, the government only allows one dinar to be passed from the groom to his father-in-law as part of the marriage contract. This is just a gesture of respect by the government to Islamic custom. The facts are, however, that women rarely demand any inheritance if it is not handed over to them in the first place, alimony and child support are extremely difficult to collect, and divorce is usually thought to be the woman's fault anyway, so the burden of her support falls back on her father and brothers as it has traditionally. Given the government constraints on the bridewealth, Kerkennis have given up making a strict set of financial conditions to the marriage at the shorta. Instead, the groom agrees to provide a large part of the trousseau (which previously was entirely supplied by the bride's family) and agrees to give her a set of gold jewelry. According to the ideology, this jewelry is simply an expression of the groom's esteem for his bride, but often the quality and weight is agreed upon in advance. The government has tried to discourage the wedding gold through propaganda and by an enormous tax on gold. However, the bridewealth is an important religious, social, and economic issue and people are willing to make a lot of sacrifices to maintain it. The insecurity and the increasing size of the bridewealth reinforces the principle of marrying close.

The fact that the economic stakes of marriage have

increased many fold has intensified and vitalized the marriage ritual itself. The additions of European decorations and fashions, have not had a structural impact on the meaning of the ritual in terms of the symbolic role transformations, but they have contributed to the inflation of the ritual economy. They have also been a way for the mainland Kerkennis to register an innovative voice and to have their mainland experience recognized without overriding the traditional structure. This is to say that European-mainland influence on dress and the introduction of the automobile in the bridal transfer are not really changes but additions which have contributed a note of glamorous intrigue. If the bride wears a long white gown to her engagement party, she still wears the traditional red and green dress to other events. if she wears high heeled shoes, she wears them with her hennaed feet and traditional silver ankle bracelets. If she is transferred in a car decorated with balloons, the traditional throne still leads the parade and is used ritually again at the birth of her first son. This is still the ultimate goal being prepared for in the ritual transformations of the bride and the groom and about which there is total, conscious, vociferous unanimity among all the categories of participants.

Paradoxically, the inflation of the wedding economy which stimulates the local economy, draws mainland Kerkennis back, and reinforces the cultural identity of

the place of origin, is part of a system of increasing economic expectations which drains Kerkennah of its young people at an increasing rate through labor migration.

More than any other ritual, the marriage ritual operates as a temporary but recurring reintegration of the immigrant and resident Kerkenni communities. Potentially polarizing and alienating statements of hierarchy and status are translated into the integrating language of ritual forms which has the character of being right and inevitable.

The marriage ritual also symbolizes a unique crossroads in the relation between the sexes. The bride is at the height of her purity, beauty and potential. She commands a position of great strength as the silent center of attention and recipient of worldly goods. For a fleeting moment, her ritually acknowledged strength is the match of her groom's.

## PILGRIMAGE

After the marriage ritual, males and females are frequently involved in rites of passage which affect them deeply, but in which they do not play the leading role. While their social roles are changing, these changes are dependent variables in relation to the key role transformations taking place. Even in the forty day ceremony, the all important mother plays a supporting role to the baby. An essential characteristic of a rite of passage is that it is a once in a lifetime event. A mother can have as many forty day ceremonies as she has babies, and a father as many circumcisions as he has sons.

The pigrimage to Mecca (hajj) is somewhat anomalous as a rite of passage, but it is the next once in a lifetime irreversible role transformation that people go through after marriage and before death. It is anomalous because it occurs every year on the Islamic calendar and technically, a Muslim could go every year. In effect, it is a once in a lifetime ritual because no Kerkenni would consider going twice. Aside from the material difficulty, it would be thought both absurd (redundant) and sinful (it would rob someone else of the opportunity to go). It is also anomalous because it is not expected that every "normal" Kerkenni will find the means to go on the hajj. This makes it different from other rites of

passage where only an abnormality would keep someone from going through it. However, in the Kerkenni context, all people profess an **aspiration** to go on the hajj and it is part of people's picture of a correct and complete life even if only a small percentage of the population achieves it. (In 1977 there were 23 pilgrims from Kerkennah compared to 9 in 1976, 21 in 1975, 22 in 1974 and 21 in 1973). This universal aspiration is reflected in the prescribed greetings which people use many times a day referring to the next important ritual in the greeted person's life. "May you be circumcised," "... married," "... have your son's circumcised," "... have your sons and daughters married," is the sequence. Once this series is spent and no longer appropriate, the next greeting to both sexes is, "May you go on the hajj." When the pilgrim returns from the hajj, there is no other ritual passage for him to anticipate and the prescribed greeting simply becomes, "May you have long life." As a rite of passage, the hajj is, in fact, a preparation for death.

The hajj is the fifth of the five pillars of Islam, after the confession of faith (shahada), the five daily prayers (salat), the giving of alms (zakat), and the fast of Ramadan (sawm). It is the last obligation both in terms of the life cycle and religious priority. The Qur'an exempts lunatics and slaves, women who have no related male protector to accompany them, and those who

are financially and medically unable. (Our'an 3:97). Some interpretations admit to the possibility of making the pilgrimage after death. Other interpretations suggest equivalences such as seven pilgrimages to the holy city of Kairowan. Clearly, good Muslims have many religiously valid reasons for not fulfilling this least obligatory of all Islamic obligations. Yet it is a very compelling focal point on many levels: it is a pan-Islamic "dynamic image" in the sense meant by W. Montgomery Watt (see Chapter Three and Watt 1961:13); it marks the completion of an entire ritual life cycle and the approach of death; and in systemic family terms, it marks the inversion of the parent-child/support-dependency relation.

In terms of the developmental cycle of sex roles, for a man the hajj marks the pinnacle of his life long journey toward maturity, judgement, wisdom, and authority. The hajj is both the goal and the reward for his increasing religious devotion. For the small number of Kerkenni women who go on the hajj, it represents a condition of being almost removed from her sex role. While not actually being made an honorary man, she takes on a somber, devout manner that is characteristic of elderly men and decidedly uncharacteristic of elderly women. In general, as women get older and pass childbearing age, they become freer in their manner and movements, more outspoken and even boisterous. This is

in stark contrast to the bridal ideal of silence and passivity as well as the penultimate male ideal of religious sobriety. This freedom is possible because being past childbearing age, it is thought that she can no longer destroy the family's honor through her "natural" sexual weakness and wildness. Also, her position in the family is now more secure than it has ever been. Ideally, she has grown sons to support her without domination and daughters-in-law to dominate. This allows her a kind of mobility and expansiveness that she has not had before. This is not to say that there are no devout women, but that female sex role does not provide a model for the austere devotion associated with male religious practice. While most women fast (sawm) for Ramadan, most do not know how to perform the five daily prayers (salat) and even fewer can read or recite portions of the Qur'an. Much of their religious practice centers around the intercession of saints which is discussed in the next chapter. This style of devotion, while not opposed, is quite different from the style required of a pilgrim. In this sense, as a female prepares to go on the hajj, she departs from what is typically female on Kerkennah and models her behavior after the more austere male religious style. When she returns, she is treated with a kind of respect normally directed toward men.

Rather than focus on what actually happens on the

hajj itself, en route and in Mecca, the following discussion will focus on the significance of this rite of passage within the context of Kerkennah society. Even given the anomalies and qualifications, the hajj on Kerkennah is a rite of passage par excellence in its stages of separation, dangerous and sacred liminality, and reintegration.

The separation begins with a great tightening up of religious practice at home. For several months before the hajj the pilgrims pay scrupulous attention to the details of the required ablutions, prayers and fasts. They make up for any fast days they may have missed due to illness or negligence in the past (qadha) and observe a number of voluntary fast days of which there are six set in the Islamic calendar. A pilgrim might also perform personal expiatory fasts for transgressions of different sorts including broken oaths and impure acts. In the case of female pilgrims, preparation for the hajj sometimes entails learning the formal prayers for the first time. Because valid prayer five times a day requires five levels of physical and spiritual purity, and because women who are still menstruating are so susceptible to unwitting physical pollution, many women do not learn how to pray until after menopause. At this time they are in less danger of invalidating their own and others prayers. These women are often taught how to pray by other women who have returned from the hajj.

After months of spiritual preparation and a particularly exacting observation of Ramadan (the hajj comes one month after Ramadan), the pilgrims and the community ready themselves for the actual departure.

The relatives and the immediate neighbors accompany the pilgrims at least to the ferry that will take them on the first leg of the journey. This parade has a somber, somewhat funereal atmosphere, unlike the previous evening. This is partly because all journeys are considered dangerous, especially for old people, but also because it is considered holy to die on the hajj. One who dies on the hajj is assured an immediate place in heaven, so it would be against the pilgrim's best spiritual interest for his relatives not to take this into account. Legend has it that the body of a pious Muslim who died on the hajj was thrown into the sea. Miraculously, it washed up on the shores of Kerkennah and a shrine was built on this spot to house his tomb and became a place of veneration. (Louis 1963:2:399).

The adult children of the pilgrims often accompany the pilgrims to the airport in Tunis in order to cherish their company up to the last minute. In the Tunis airport, there is a micro version of what they will find in Jedda: thousands as opposed to hundreds of thousands of pilgrims all moving in the same direction.

While the pilgrims are away, the `id el kbir (the feast of the sacrifice) is celebrated. The family of the

pilgrim is treated with a combination of respect and pity for their temporary "orphaned" condition. The absence of the household head is particularly felt at this time because he would normally ritually slaughter the sheep for the *`id*, the single most important event on the Islamic ritual calendar. Kerkennis know that this same ritual is being carried out by their own *hajjis* in the valley of Mina. Identification is also heightened by the fact that they can watch the progress of the pilgrimage on Tunisian television.

The pilgrims return about a month after their departure to a joyful heroes' welcome with music and *you yous* at the port at Sidi Youssef. There are special meals prepared and the pilgrims receive extensive welcome home visits from all their close relatives and neighbors. In some villages a group of twenty to thirty men gathers to sing a *mulid* to celebrate the return of the pilgrims. This is a song about the life of the Prophet that takes about two hours to sing. It is in the style of the songs of praise still sung at the gatherings (*hadra*) of Sufi brotherhoods at various shrines on the mainland. These brotherhoods are no longer active on Kerkennah (see Chapter Five), but the songs and music are well-known and still used in a devotional way. The men sing the main verses of the song while the women, children and other guests on the periphery join in the rousing refrains. These songs are always dedicated to a

specific purpose and in this case, it is a way for the community to reintegrate those who have returned from a dangerous and sacred mission.

This is also an instance of the Big (hajj) and Little (hadra) Traditions of Islam being in dynamic relation to each other in the local context. It is an example of the mutual religious stimulation that the two traditions bring to each other without becoming homogenized into one thing. Pamela Johnson, in her study, A Sufi Shrine in Modern Tunisia, discusses how modern Tunisians participate in orthodox and popular Islamic practices strategically for different purposes and at different times in their lives. They see orthodox and popular practices as a range of distinct, but concurrently available resources (1979). The mutual dependency rather than mutual exclusivity of high and low religious practices has been examined extensively and cross-culturally by I.M. Lewis (1971,1986). He argues that there is often a religious division of labor in which one part (or sex) of the society gets a vicarious or covert benefit from the contrasting religious behavior of that other part of the society. In the Kerkennah context, the villagers definitely get a vicarious benefit from the orthodoxy of the hajjis and the singing of the popular mulid is a way for the parochial sphere to claim that benefit. The parochial asserts itself at the same time as it pays tribute to the universal.

All pilgrims bring home vast quantities of holy souvenirs imbued with the blessing (baraka) of the hajj which are rapidly distributed and redistributed throughout the community. This exchange of visits and gifts helps to neutralize the social danger of re-entry. The pilgrims themselves are received as if they were sacred objects imbued with the baraka of the hajj, which they are in a sense. They are holy symbols of the pan-Islamic tradition. This objectification of the pilgrims is reflected in the fact that they all take on the common title of pilgrim (hajj) or pilgrimess (hajja) and cease to use their given names. They are addressed as hajj or hajja even by their own children and grandchildren. To a degree, they have withdrawn from their pre-hajj identity and take on the joint identity of this titled category. Other rites of passage have titles associated with them, `arusa (bride) and mitahir (the circumcised) for example, but these are used only temporarily and often as an affectionate nickname rather than a permanent title of respect. Both male and female pilgrims, because of their new religious weight, are treated as "lay preachers" who teach their contemporaries how to pray and other techniques of religious practice and who comment unchallenged about religious matters in general. As in all rites of passage, there are systemic role changes as well as the focal transformation. In the case of the hajj, the adult children who are financing the journey,

as well as the parents who are fulfilling the religious obligation, are achieving new positions in the developmental cycle of the family. I know of no instance where a hajj was not financed by the adult children of the pilgrims. Consequently, this event confers great honor on both parties. The grown child is behaving in an exemplary manner which proves that the parents have succeeded in raising a good son (for it is usually a son or sons.)

Financing a pilgrimage is an emphatic announcement that the dependent relationship of child on parent has been fully reversed. Throughout the son's childhood and adolescence, the parents have the expectation that the care and expense they invest in him will be reciprocated when the son is grown. This is a specific and direct expectation. The financing of the hajj is the most dramatic means available for a son to acknowledge his obligation to his parents and his willingness to take up the role of provider, (a role, in fact, that he may already have been playing for a long time.)

Because the pilgrimage in 1978 cost a minimum of 800TD, this represents a significant sacrifice on the part of the son, his wife and children. It is, therefore, a powerful statement of loyalty. The period of early marriage and childrearing is often a time when parents feel that they are being neglected by their adult son and they usually blame his wife for this "alienation

of affections." Given this common source of tension, a son who provides for a hajj is making an all the more potent statement of solidarity with his father's dar. This statement of solidarity and affirmation of Islamic values may be especially significant coming from an affluent European or Tunis based son. As with other major rituals, it is a way for absent Kerkennis to claim their origins and to recover some of the distance they have traveled away from this traditional life.

The Qur'an states that the hajj is only incumbent on those who can afford it. For this reason, people do not consider going on the hajj until they have taken care of all their family obligations. That is, until all the children are married and settled or in the case of slow-to-marry daughters, until their potential marriages are provided for. In this sense, the hajj is not only a final religious duty, it is also a celebratory punctuation mark in the life cycle announcing that all parental obligations have been fulfilled. (Ernest Gellner reports that in Turkey it is considered a sin to go on the hajj before educating and marrying off one's offspring. [Personal communication]).

The financial timing of the hajj is revealing in terms of competing values and areas of flexibility in the family budget. A son can build a separate house for his wife and children before laying out a large sum for his father's pilgrimage. But a son who has a place to live

in Tunis or Sfax should not build himself a holiday home on Kerkennah until he has arranged for his parent's hajj. It happens that the hajj is often followed by the building of such a second home, leading one to think that sometimes the parental hajj is a financial obstacle to be overcome before other personal material ambitions can be fulfilled. When a son reaches a certain level of prosperity and his father shows religious desire, it is nearly impossible for the son not to finance the hajj. He has more choice about whether or not to send his mother (a great and rare status symbol for the family), and whether he wants to help his affines fulfill this obligation. Unlike ordinary generosity, the financing of the hajj has a symbolic meaning that permanently changes the donor's relationship to the pilgrims.

Although they return to their normal domestic and economic activities, pilgrims are strictly and austerely observant for the rest of their lives following the hajj in a way they may not have been before. Religiously, they express their condition, "Now I am ready to die," ("ana hadhir" literally, "I am ready").

## DEATH RITUAL

A death is announced by the loud ritualized wailing of the women of the deceased's household. Never more than twenty-four hours passes between the death and the burial. If a person dies in the morning, an afternoon

burial is planned and if he dies in the afternoon, he is buried the next morning. Every village has several washers of the dead of both sexes. They are not specially trained, but rather have achieved reputations for correct religious practice, piety and charity. One or more of these same-sex specialists or close same-sex relatives wash the deceased. They follow the same formula of the ritual ablution (ghsul) that prepares one for the five daily prayers (salat). Any tatoos on the body are bandaged because the body should go back to God as He made it. The body is dressed in a clean set of normal clothes. André Louis reports that female corpses on Kerkennah were dressed is two pairs of underclothes and two blouses (1963:2:274). Males are covered in their traditional burnous and women in the traditional tarf. All corpses are then wrapped in a plain white shroud.

The bier (djinaza) is fetched from the village mosque where it is stored and four men carry the corpse from the house of the deceased to the mosque followed by a procession of male mourners. In the mosque the imam, standing at the head of the bier if it is a male and at the foot if it is a female, leads the prescribed prayers for the dead (salat'ala el maiyit). Then the imam leads a procession of mourners, joined now by the female mourners, from the mosque to the graveyard. First comes the bearers with the bier, then the male mourners, and then the females. Only adults participate in the cortege

which is always made on foot. This is a silent procession save for the weeping of women. A grave has been dug earlier by male friends and relatives of the deceased and the bier is laid alongside the open grave. Carrying the bier and digging the grave are considered acts of charity that bring religious blessing. Communal prayers are said. The imam pronounces the shahada into the ear of the corpse, as the infant's father does upon its birth, and the shrouded corpse is lowered into the grave. Each of the mourners throws a handful of dirt into the grave and utters a blessing. The grave is filled in with dirt and covered with a pile of stones which will then be white washed. Condolences are offered to the bereaved family and the congregation disperses.

The family of the deceased distributes pieces of bread throughout the village. This is called both a sudqa (act of charity) and a samah (peace offering). A sudqa is different from a zakat (alms) in that it is a voluntary act of generosity rather than an obligation. This sudqa is offered in the name of the deceased as a last earthly good deed to help him get out of purgatory and to improve his record on the Day of Judgement. The response to this offering is, "May God have mercy on him," (Allah yrhim). The giving of the piece of bread is also a peace offering to anyone in the community the deceased may have offended and a plea for forgiveness. Repentance and forgiveness are not the same thing as a

young Kerkenni woman explained to me, "If I steal someone's money and I return it with an apology and that person does not forgive me, God will not forgive me either. I must have that person's forgiveness also." The forgiveness of the community is necessary for the release of the deceased's soul from purgatory. The fact that it reaches beyond the grave is a good gauge of the power of public opinion in this local culture. Unforgiven offences are sometimes attributed to a woman's difficulty in delivering a baby and if the labor is very prolonged, a samah will be sent out on her behalf to release the fetus. Similarly, a groom will ask for forgiveness of anyone he fears he might have offended before his wedding night because it is thought that the unforgiving victim can cause him to be impotent. Clearly, at these dangerous passages, the vulnerable individual is in the hands of the community, even in death.

For the days following the death, there is a steady stream of visitors: villagers, relatives from the mainland and other villages, paying condolences and sitting with the family. Close friends and relatives provide food and beverages as the bereaved abstain from all work and normal activities for nine days. They, like the vulnerable departed soul, are at the mercy of their immediate community for benign treatment. Visiting the bereaved and donating food are important reciprocal acts

which are carefully noted in the family's mental logbook of social debts. Digging the grave, attending the burial, and visiting the bereaved are ritual "goods and services" that people exchange and that people use to demonstrate their social closeness to or distance from each other.

The poor of the village play a special role at times of misfortune. Because they are thought to have the most to forgive those who may have been uncharitable, their presence (and implicit pardon) is desired at funerals. Also, because they have nothing material to exchange in the community system of social reciprocity, their visits to the ill and bereaved are seen as a form of charity **from** the poor. This is how they discharge their social debts and maintain their own level of honor in the face of potentially humiliating dependency.

The community shows its respect for the bereaved by condolence visits and the bereaved show the depth of their grief through ritual neglect and abuse of their own persons. In addition to wailing, bereaved women tear their cheeks with their fingernails. For forty days, they neglect their hygiene and do nothing to beautify themselves. They wash, but do not shampoo or comb their hair, do not depiliate their faces or bodies, and do not wear any kind of cosmetics or perfume. The men follow a modified version of this personal neglect, much like the groom in the days preceeding his marriage.

The self-definition of the dar represented by the observation of this form of mourning is probably a clearer delineation of the dar's boundaries than any other indicator. (See Chapter One for a discussion of the problematic definition of the dar.) The immediate family does not cook for nine days and after that, they do not cook or eat anything sweet, go to any weddings, circumcisions or other celebrations. Depending on the relationship to the deceased, abstinence from the pleasures of life can go on for up to a year. Nine months after the death of her father, a forty year old Kerkenni woman minutely supervised her ten year old daughter in making special cakes for the `Id es Sghir almost to the degree of moving her hands for her so that she would not violate the symbolic principle of her mourning. These abstinences are typical of rites of separation, of which mourning must be the most extreme example because the bereaved is separating himself from the normal social world as well as from the recently deceased.

On the fortieth day after the death, a smaller service than the funeral is held in the cemetery. Again it is initiated with ritual wailing, verses from the Qur'an are read, prayers are said, and an offering of bread is made to the poor. After this, the deceased is remembered (dhikr) with Qur'an readings over the grave at dawn on the major `ids and especially on the first

Friday after the `Id es Sgir which is a special day for the remembrance of the dead. In mainland towns, the bereaved sometimes hire specialists to read the entire Qur'an over the grave of the dead, but this does not exist on Kerkennah and is a form of religious sophistication that they do not respect.

The rules of mourning and the ways of showing grief, not surprisingly, are different for males and females. This is consistent with all the other rites of passage that have been examined. It is striking, though, that the sex role differences follow the deceased into the grave. The double layer of clothing that protects the female corpse from immodesty or some other sexual danger is echoed in the head and footstones that distinguish female graves from male graves. When asked why male graves have only a headstone, a middle-aged Kerkenni man answered, "A woman has a stone on her feet because she has always been kept in the house and its keeps her from wandering around now that she's free and out of the house."

There is a positive form of power in the portrayal of women as the negative image of male morality and maturity. The fact that her character is seen as needing control within a segregated domain recognizes her threatening capacity. In the degree to which she is segregated, she also excludes. In the degree to which important communal events take place within this domain,

she controls. This control is exercised subtly in the annual Islamic festivals and expansively in the cult of the saints discussed in Chapter Five.

## CHAPTER FIVE

## THE BIG AND LITTLE TRADITIONS IN CONTEXT

### ANNUAL ISLAMIC RITUALS

Pan-Islamic or Big Tradition scheduled rituals as observed on Kerkennah occur in two cycles: daily and annual, following a lunar calendar. The daily Islamic rituals mostly concern the five daily prayers and the ablutions that precede them. There are seven major events with special observances and celebrations on the lunar Islamic calendar: Rass el `Am, the New Year; `Ashura, marking the death of Hussain at Kerbala; Mulid, the birthday of the Prophet; Ramadan, the month of fasting; Leilet el Qadr, the Night of the Divine Decree when the Our'an was first recited to the Prophet by the Angel Gabriel; `Id es Sghir, the Feast of the Breaking of the Fast of Ramadan; and `Id el Kbir, the Feast of the Sacrifice of Abraham.

While these festivals all have important pan-Islamic sources of which the Kerkennis are articulately aware, they are, in practice, celebrations of the **community**. In this sense, they are the Big Tradition celebrating the Little Tradition and not the other way around. The main focus for the celebration of the community in all these cases is the ritual forum of food and hospitality. In

spite of (actually, because of) the fact that Ramadan is the month of fasting, there is no time when the preparation and sharing of food takes on more importance. But the symbolism of food and the sharing of it is central to all of these pan-Islamic festivals.

Although the sexual division of religious labor is apparent in the Qur'an readings of Ramadan and the ritual sacrifice of the sheep on the `Id el Kbir, it is really women who control these Big Tradition festivals. All of the main events of these festivals take place within the domestic domain controlled by women. Women orchestrate the preparation, presentation, distribution and ceremonial aspects of food This is a serious form of power. In ordinary circumstances, the control (and often production) of food is an important source of women's power, but it is doubly so when food is also the symbolic language which connects the Big Tradition to the Little Tradition, as it does in the case of these pan-Islamic festivals. The symbolic language of food and hospitality is part of the oral culture of Kerkennah and it allows "ritually silent" women to speak with clarity and force.

## Rass el `Am

Rass el `Am, the New Year, is the closest thing to an agrarian festival in the Islamic calendar in spite of the fact that it belongs to no particular season. Agricultural fertility, and prosperity in general, are

symbolized in the celebratory foods of hard boiled eggs and mlukhia, a thick green sauce made from the wild mallow plant. On the eve of the New Year, a couscous is made with meat preserved from the `Id el Kbir twenty days earlier. The next day and for several following days, couscous is not served. Valensi (1977:172) explains that this is because couscous is cooked in a closed pot and the New Year should begin under a sign of openness. I was also told that cooking couscous on the New Year would appear as if they were hoarding food from the year before for fear that God would not provide and hence be a sign of faithlessness. An alternative explanation given was that cooking couscous as a New Year's dish would imply that there had been an overabundance the year before which would be negatively corrected in the coming year's harvests. On New Year's morning, everyone in the household is served a hard boiled egg, a symbol of prosperity and a delicacy in the Kerkenni diet. The eggs are boiled in the green water used to prepare the mallow plants for the mlukhia. The mlukhia, a thick green vegtable paste, made only on this one day a year, is served with New Year's greetings and wishes for everyone's prosperity. There is a certain amount of local holiday visiting within the community, but not many mainland relatives return for this holiday because it comes so soon after the `Id el Kbir. Other than the special foods and greetings, people pursue their normal

activities.

## `Ashura

`Ashura is a two day feast accompanied by two days of recommended (mandub), but not required fasting. It is said that fasting these two days is equivalent to fasting thirty ordinary days. This fast is considered an atonement, as are the graveyard visits made on this day. Women are particularly active in the remembrance of the Kerkenni dead which takes the form of dawn visits to the graveyard, special tending and decoration of the graves with myrtle plants, Our'an readings over the grave, and the giving of alms and food to the poor in the name of the deceased. The graveyard, while not a "stronghold" of women like the saints' shrines, is a sanctified place favored by women for the more austere and orthodox aspects of their religious practice. The focus on the Our'an and the observation of the orthodox pillars of prayer (salat) and alms (zakat) make the graveyard more like a mosque for women than the saints' shrines which they favor for other aspects of religious practice, as will be discussed in the next section.

`Ashura, meaning the "tenth," is celebrated on the ninth and tenth days of Muharram, the first month of the year. It marks the death of the Prophet's grandson, Hussain, at the battle of Kerbala, which is the central ritual event in the Shi`a sect. Sunni Kerkennis recognize the origin of this holiday and treat it as a

special day to remember the dead, but they do not sanctify the memory of Hussain in particular. There are places in Tunisia where the Battle of Kerbala is acted out in what is locally called a fantasia with horses and costumed riders in the atmosphere of a carnival.

The extent of the carnival on Kerkennah, however, is the relaxation of the prohibition of make-up for unmarried girls and the passing out of candy, toys, and noisemakers to the young children. André Louis (1963:2:390) reports that young men in the 1950's wore disguises as part of this celebration, but this custom is no longer observed. Unmarried girls on Kerkennah do not wear traditional or modern make-up. It is thought to be sexually provocative and mainland Kerkenni girls who have been "Europeanized" to the extent of wearing make-up, do not do so when visiting the islands. (It is often startling to see a bride on the night of consummation suddenly painted, powdered, and pencilled for the first time). On `Ashura unmarried girls and married women alike make themselves up and take special care with their hair, attracting a great deal of joking and admiring attention from both sexes.

On the eve of `Ashura, the prescribed holiday food is chicken cooked with pasta. Those who cannot afford or obtain a chicken, use eggs as a substitute. At dawn and throughout the morning, there are remembrances of the dead and sharing of food with the poor in the graveyard.

Later in the day, whispering and giggling groups of young girls stroll through the village, young boys observe and comment, and little children play with their noisemakers. Dried fruit and nuts are another classic food of this holiday and vast quantities of them are passed out and redistributed during the strolling and visiting throughout the village. On the evening of the tenth of Muharram, a dish with lamb should be served.

Unlike other holidays, there is a prohibition on ordinary work for both sexes (with the exclusion of cooking). It is not uncommon for men to take days off for religious holidays and other reasons, but women do their characteristic work no matter what. Consequently, the work prohibition of `Ashura affects them more than it affects men. This, the graveyard visits, and the emphasis on beautification makes `Ashura a favorite female holiday.

### `Id el Mulid

`Id el Mulid, on the twelfth day of the third month (Rabia el Awwil), is a celebration of the birth of the Prophet. As discussed in Chapter Four, it is the day when the male children of the poor are circumcised at the expense of the community. The special food of this holiday is `asida, a sweet dish associated with birth and other celebrations, such as a new house. It is made from cooking olive oil, wheat, and sugar or honey together. `Asida is also served to all well-wishers who come to

visit a newly delivered mother and baby. (To claim lifelong knowledge of someone, Kerkennis say,"I ate from his `asida." [Louis 1963:2:12]). The birth of the Prophet is commemorated in the evening in some villages by the communal singing of the "mulid," a long rousing song about the Prophet's life. The `Id el Mulid is a relatively minor holiday on Kerkennah, unlike many places on the mainland, especially the holy city of Kairowan.

## Ramadan

Ramadan is the religious event which has the biggest impact on people's lives because of the rigors of the fast. The fast (sawm) of Ramadan is the third pillar of Islam and is incumbent on all those who are sane (`agel) and mature (baligh). Those who are ill with no hope of recovery and pregnant or nursing women who fear for their child are excused. Travellers, menstruating women, and those with a recoverable illness are allowed to make-up (qadha) the fast later.

Kerkennis take the fast very seriously and although it is impossible to know exact numbers, nearly all adults seem to observe it. Young men are known to have the worst fasting "record." This is disapproved of, but tolerated in the sense that their mothers often cook for them. In the cities, it is understood that many people do not fast, but just show respect by not eating or smoking in public. On Kerkennah, as stressed above, the private realm is more exposed to public scrutiny than the

public realm, so a "discreet" approach to the fast is not possible. My strong impression, having spent two Ramadans with Kerkennis, is that they meet the challenge of the fast head-on.

This is consistent with the requirements of the fast, for before one actually abstains from food, a commitment of intention (niya) must be made, otherwise the fast would be invalid. In this sense, there is no accidental fasting and once the commitment is made, the fast must be made up (qadha) if it is broken. In addition to niya, and abstinance from food and liquids (sawm), abstinence from muftirat is also required. Literally, this means "the entering into the body of any substance that is done consciously and is preventable," but also refers to substances leaving the body including sexual intercourse, deliberate seminal emissions resulting from sexual contact, deliberate vomiting, menstruation, and post-partum bleeding. (Encyclopedia of Islam 1934:4:192).

The fast begins before sunrise on the first day of the ninth month when there is enough light to distinguish a black thread from a white thread. About an hour before this, a poor person appointed by the imam goes through the village beating a drum to wake people up so that they can have a last predawn meal (sahur). He does this every night for the entire month. An individual's fast is not considered complete until he has paid this awakener the zakat el fitr, the special alms of Ramadan

on the morning of the `Id es Sghir.

Because Ramadan moves through the solar calendar every thirty-three years, some fasts are much more taxing than others, ranging from ten to sixteen hours of abstinence. People talk about hard fasts of the past and the general difficulty of it is readily acknowledged, but a personal statement of suffering is never made. Such a complaint would compromise the niya necessary to the fast. It is common, however, for people to stick out their parched tongues for inspection and to show how loose their clothes have become, but this is more pride than complaint.

In addition to the fast, Ramadan is a month devoted to the reading of the Our`an. It is especially meritorious and beneficial to be absorbed in the Our`an during the long days and it is thought that this absorption makes the fast easier. One sees men who would normally be weaving fish nets with their friends in the village square sitting alone reciting or reading the Our`an day after day. This is also done in the graveyards. The days of Ramadan are unusual in that the religious focus is on the individual and his private experience of the Word.

Abdul Hamid el Zein, in his study of religious symbolism in the Kenyan coastal town of Lamu, The Sacred Meadows, argues that Ramadan is a month of liminal sacred time, a state of purity and timelessness unified through

the indivisible recitation of the Qur`an. He holds that the month of Ramadan, in its focus on the Qur`an, is an Eden of pure God in contrast to the normal time of the other eleven months which focuses on the earthly intervention of the Prophet Mohammed. (1974:221-80).

The fast and the absorption in the Qur`an on Kerkennah certainly make Ramadan an otherworldly period, unique in the Islamic year. However, I would argue that the shift between "worlds" or time and timelessness takes place everyday during Ramadan and that this abrupt swing from one mode to the other every dawn and dusk is part of what gives Ramadan its intensity. I would further argue that the significant shift is between the daytime solitary contemplation of the Word and the nightime group celebration of the Community through the rituals of communal recitations and hospitality.

It is part of the drama of Ramadan that the deprivations of the day should be countered by culinary opulence at night. Indeed, the somber, sleepy, and almost morbid atmosphere of the daytime gives over to feasting and celebration every night. Enormous attention is paid to the planning and preparation of the nighttime meals with special emphasis on the variety of dishes. This is a particular challenge on Kerkennah where the range of foods available is limited. There is considerable competition for the fresh foods brought over from the mainland to the village shops and women

strategize at length about how to get eggs or onions. Food scarcity is a big problem every summer when there are many mainland visitors to feed. When Ramadan comes during the summer, too, the problem is acerbated. This is the reason many city Kerkennis give for staying on the mainland during Ramadan and coming only for the `Id. Spending Ramadan on Kerkennah is a strong statement for a mainland Kerkenni to make about his identification with the islands and this is duly noted by the permanent residents. Island Kerkennis speak scornfully of city people who gain weight during the month of fasting. This said, however, the Kerkennis try to create as sumptuous a diet as they can for their nighttime repasts.

When the muezzin of the village mosque (and also the one on the television) announces the setting of the sun, the meal is ready and the family is seated. A good Ramadan meal starts with water and some fruit, this is followed by soup and bread, then a main course of pasta or couscous and finally tea and more fruit. In Sfax, two or three courses might be added to this, the whole meal taking up to four hours to eat. Before retiring, another small meal is served, and then again another just before dawn.

After the first meal, a great round of visiting takes place throughout the village. Women and girls visit within the village quarter and men and boys go to the cafés and village square until late into the night.

Certain households known for their religious devotion hold communal Our'an recitations everynight during Ramadan as described in Chapter Three. Normally, a group of ten to twelve men sit in a circle in the middle of the courtyard each reciting the same passage in succession before proceeding to the next. Women and children stand and sit on the periphery and sometimes on the rooftops listening and chatting, coming and going as they please. The hostesses serve a constant round of tea, soda, and syrups throughout the reading and when it is over, a new course of melon, dates, and cakes is served. Clearly, such hospitality is expensive, but a dar which has an established tradition of nightly Our'an readings during Ramadan wins prestige on every possible scale: the ability to attract many visitors, hospitality, generosity, religious piety, and Our'anic learning. All of this pays off in the many spheres of exchange which characterize village social life.

Because people may have slept a good deal during the day (school and bureaucratic hours are adjusted for Ramadan), real social life takes place late at night. This inversion is exciting, as are the accelerated visits among friends and relatives in the village. It brings honor on the dar to have frequent visitors and this is even more true during the `ids when these visits take on a more formal air. The host is always in a powerful position and the guest, even an honored guest, is in a

structurally dependent and submissive position. This is why it is always better to be the host than the guest, although one must make visits in order to receive them. (One indication of the power of the host is that traditionally, it is forbidden [haram] for the guest to fast without the permission of the host just as a child must have the permission of his father [Encyclopedia of Islam 1934:4:192]).

The host is in a position to demonstrate the grace, openness, and generosity of the dar, as well as its material strength. The guest can only acknowledge these messages by accepting the hospitality offered. Any gift he has brought is whisked away without acknowledgement, for it would prematurely and unnaturally cancel the necessary debt of the guest. Gifts of food are never served on the occasion when they are presented, for it would imply that the host did not have enough in the first place. The guest is literally physically taken over by the host. He is seated and reseated with the periodic addition and adjustment of pillows and sheepskins. He is sprinkled with cologne. He is urged (perhaps too mild a verb) to eat and if it is a communal bowl, choice morsels are continually tumbled in his direction. His only defence is to call on God, "el hamdulillah" (praise be to God) to end the meal. The leave-taking is long with many entreaties to return. The host has won the competition by creating a debt on the

part of the guest. The guest can only recover by getting the host to submit to his even more lavish hospitality upon a reciprocal visit.

Everything that has been said about hosts and guests is true for hostesses and female guests as well. In fact, there is a much more active cycle of visiting among women than there is among men. In this sense, women represent and control the prestige of the dar in their hosting and visiting habits. This cycle of feasting and competitive hospitality is as essential a part of Ramadan as the fast itself.

## Leilet el Qadr

Leilet el Qadr, the 27th of Ramadan, is the night of the divine decree or literally, "the night of power," when the Quran was first revealed to the Prophet Mohammed. It is considered a blessed night when good deeds should be done and miracles happen. The pan-Islamic tradition is that on this night the whole sky miraculously lights up. The lighting up of the sky is considered a sign of God's pleasure with his people for the fast of Ramadan. The Muslim who sees this divine light is granted a wish which will automatically come true.

Refinements and variations of this tradition on Kerkennah include: that one person in all of Islam will see the divine light and get his wish; that many people will see the light, but only he whose mouth has not been

miraculously sealed will be able to ask for and get his wish; that many people have had this experience and they become like saints (wali) and people flock around them to share the blessing (baraka); that if you wish for money, God will not shower you with gold, but will help you little by little in your work.

I spoke to a number of Kerkennis who claim to have seen the divine light, but none of them reported the miraculous granting of a wish. One man of sixty said, "When I was about eighteen, I got up to pee and saw the whole sky light up like day. They say that if you make a wish when you see this, it will come true, only I didn't know this. This is why I tell my children about it, so they will be ready." For the others, seeing the light was miracle enough.

These privileged Kerkennis would probably agree with Mircea Eliade's analysis of the meaning of the divine light of the Leilet el Qadr, although they might state it more economically:

> "One can say that the meaning of the supernatural light is directly conveyed to the soul of the man who experiences it - and yet this meaning can only come fully to his consciousness clothed in a pre-existent ideology. Here lies the paradox: the meaning of the light is, on the one hand, ultimately a personal discovery, and, on the other, each man discovers what he was spiritually and culturally prepared to discover. Yet there remains this fact which seems to us fundamental: whatever his previous ideological conditioning, a meeting with the light produces a break in the subject's existence, revealing to him - or making it clearer than before - the world of the spirit, of holiness and of freedom; in brief, existence as a divine creation or the world sanctified by the presence of God. (1969:77).

The possibility of seeing the divine light is unique in the Kerkenni Islamic experience because it is a miracle that takes place directly between the Muslim and God. There is no intervention of saints, who are the usual recipients and redistributors of miracles. Also, it is a free gift for which there is no preparation as the pillars of Islam prepare one for salvation.

The Leilet el Qadr is also a celebration of the free gift of the Our'an which infuses Kerkenni life in the many ways described in Chapter Three. Nearly all men participate in special Our'an readings on this night even if they have not been doing so on the other nights of Ramadan.

Meanwhile, because the `Id es Sghir is only three days away, the women are absorbed in baking cookies and cakes which are the crucial food of the holiday celebrating breaking the fast. These nightly cooking sessions usually take place in neighborhood groups more for the company than the mutual aid. There is much notice and discussion of the quality and quantity of cakes being prepared by each household. This competitive display is aided by the fact that the trays of cakes are carried through the village to the bakery oven and then back again for all to see. Once again the excesses of the Sfaxis are the butt of Kerkenni jokes. Kerkenni women make much fun of the dishonorable lengths

that Sfaxi women will go to to be able to afford lots of nuts and honey in their `Id cakes. (Neither ingredient is used in the spare Kerkenni recipes).

The `Id begins with a dawn prayer session for the men in the mosque and graveyard Our'an readings, although the fast of Ramadan does not officially end until the village awakener has been paid the set obligatory alms of the `Id, the zakat el fitr. Still quite early in the morning, villagers make very short visits to every household in the village with which they have a significant current relationship. This means about twenty visits which consist of special greetings for the `Id and an almost comically speeded up version of normal hospitality with the entreaties to sit, eat, stay, and return all done with both the host and the guest standing up. The minimum required from the guest is to eat one spoonful from the large bowl of food on a little table in the middle of the courtyard and wish the host a prosperous year. This bowl of food is usually some mundane pasta dish, but if the guest is especially honored, other more refined dishes are rushed out. These characteristically include smoked fish and a raisin and onion sauce. These two Kerkenni `Id specialties are served first thing in the morning because they are thought to "open the stomach" so that a lot can be eaten during the day.

The circuit of visits that members of the dar make on

this morning tour clearly defines that dar's alliances and alignments within the village. Neglecting to make such a visit is a statement to the neglected party that will certainly have repercussions. The essential symbolic act in these visits is the token spoonful of food, which, because the competitive aspect of hospitality has been dispensed with in fast motion, is more straightforwardly a statement of peace and goodwill between the two dars. That afternoon and the next day, people return to the more familiar pattern of visiting and hospitality, going to see their close relatives and friends in the village, elsewhere on the islands, and in Sfax.

All major rituals stimulate the local economy and speed up the redistribution of wealth in the community. New clothing, which is another obligatory feature of the `Id es Sghir, even for the poorest members of the community, causes the cottage seamstress industry to thrive in every village. For economic reasons, nearly all clothing is handmade on Kerkennah, even the "European" styles favored by young girls. Seamstressing is a desirable and unique economic role because it allows a woman to be both modern and professional and still cooperate with the traditional rural model of working within the domestic domain. She wins at both games by maintaining her desirability as an honorable and modest girl working under the protection

of her father's roof and at the same time, having the appeal of a career girl who can bring hard cash to the family budget. (Vanessa Maher's ongoing work on Italian seamstresses drew my attention to the unusual social position of these women. Personal communication).

Unlike other ritual specialists, such as the hennana and traditional musicians, the seamstress can make a regular living off the ritual cycle and the demand for `Id and wedding clothing. The seamstress is also different from the other traditional rural female professions, such as midwife and marabout guardian, in that modernization has enhanced rather than undermined her specialty. The seamstress is a powerful link between the mainland and island cultures. She transposes the innovations and expanding material expectations of the mainland into the format of the established ritual system, contributing to its vitality and stability.

## `Id el Kbir

The central event of the `Id el Kbir, which comes six weeks after the `Id es Sghir, is the ritual slaughtering of a sheep, commemorating the sacrifice of Abraham. It is incumbent on every household to slaughter an animal and to give the choicest part, the right shoulder and foreleg, to someone poor. Most families give their charity to the same poor person every year, usually a childless widow. This continuity creates something like a fostering relationship and this widow can expect alms

and gifts of food from this family on other occasions throughout the year.

A sheep is a significant piece of capital, costing about 3ØTD at one year old. If they do not already have a small flock, most households try to obtain a lamb early in the year in order to avoid this large expense when the `Id demand inflates the price of sheep. It is ritually acceptable, but socially pitiable, for a poor family to slaughter a goat instead of a sheep. Mainland Kerkennis are drawn to the islands for the `Id el Kbir for many reasons including the economic and logistical disadvantages of slaughtering a sheep in the city. Kerkennis show their characteristic contempt for urban religious practice by saying, "the Sfaxis take their `Id out of the fridge." Many mainland households own a small flock for the purposes of the `Id which is mananaged by their island relatives and they come for the holiday and slaughter their own sheep. Many other mainlanders come and participate in the `Id as part of a temporarily reconstituted extended family. Next to the wedding season, the `Id el Kbir is the occasion of the biggest reunion of the mainland and island components of Kerkennah.

The `Id begins at dawn on the tenth day of the twelfth Islamic month, Dhu el Hijja, when the men attend a special prayer session in the mosque, lasting up to four hours. There are also Qur'an readings in the

gaveyard, as on all important holidays. When they return home, the head of the household takes the appointed sheep to an open space outside the house, announces a special blessing and slits the throat of the sheep. After most of the blood has drained out, the animal is skinned and butchered. These tasks are shared by the two sexes, the men doing the major butchering and skinning, and the women cleaning and preparing the skin, head, organs, and meat. All of this is a strenuous work and I often heard women say they preferred the _`Id es Sghir_ because "all you do is eat cakes and visit." The _`Id_ lasts for three days and each day has a special lamb dish prepared for it, lamb couscous, stuffed intestines, and brain. The remainder of the meat is preserved in a variety of ways: salted, dried in the sun, and stored in oil. While animal protein is rare in the Kerkenni diet, meat from the _`Id_ has a special religious value and is saved for future special occasions, including the New Year's celebration. Like the _`Id es Sghir_, much of the _`Id el Kbir_ is taken up with visiting tours of the village and elaborate exchanges of hospitality.

In a very intense way, all of these pan-Islamic annual rituals are insular rituals of "communitas" focused on temporarily eliminating the distinguishing barriers between different parts of the community and reconstituting a whole out of the parts that have departed. The same ritual elements are used repeatedly

in all of these rituals in pursuit of this goal. The graveyard readings beckon back the community that has died; the alms and offerings to the poor pull them closer and diminish their distinguishing poverty; the celebrations of kin entice the mainland Kerkennis back and disguise their distinguishing affluence; the competitive hospitality speeds up and intensifies the exchanges which connect the dars to each other; the holiday promenades are a relaxation of the boundaries of the female domestic domain; and the circulation and sharing of special and often symbolic foods is the most elemental mode of cohesion.

On another level, which is conscious and verbalized, Kerkennis recognize and revere the pan-Islamic significance of all of these Big Tradition annual rituals. Running in parallel with the pan-Islamic content of these annual rituals is what might be called the "pan-Kerkenni" content. By this I mean something different from the ritual experience of "communitas" which is so important in the reconnection of the different parts of the local community. Both the pan-Islamic and pan-Kerkenni messages have to do with **correct practice** and they are related to each other.

Kerkennis feel that simply being Kerkenni gives them a head start on being good Muslims, that their social and physical environment aids them in following the straight path (el mustaqim). They also feel that other

environments, especially the cities and Sfax, in particular, make it difficult for people to be good Muslims. Kerkennis say that the simplicity and hardiness of their diet (fish and grain) which they catch and produce themselves makes them stronger than other people and more able to fast and still work hard, which is what God wants. They say that they are closer to God because everything they require comes directly from the sky or the sea or the earth. They also say that the peaceful conditions (dinya ra'idha) make it possible for them to contemplate the Qur'an and give proper attention to their daily prayers. The lack of anonymity is given as the reason why people give alms readily and there are no beggars on Kerkennah.

In addition to being better able to do what is required (wajib), they see themselves as less vulnerable to those things which are forbidden (haram). This is not just because forbidden things are less available, but because what they see as their simpler way of life (hiyat en nass) makes them less confused than people who live in the city. These kinds of statements are given by Kerkennis of both sexes and of varying ages as well as by mainland Kerkennis.

It is not unusual for a community to think that its religious practices are correct and orthodox. What is interesting in the case of Kerkennah is the way in which they see their setting, their locality itself, as

providing the **means** to correct practice. There is a sense of privileged access to Big Tradition pan-Islamic orthodoxy through their connection with this specific place. This is not the same as privileged access to God through the intercession of saints even when the saint has sanctified a particular location. As discussed in the next section, local saints are local in a stylized way and this is not the source of their power which is mystical and otherworldly. Kerkennis do not see their islands as a sacred place, but rather as an austere guide to a proper Islamic life, similar to the role of the Our`an. Kerkennah, the place and local culture, as a source of puritan orthodoxy is an example of the parochial universalizing **itself**, to extend McKim Marriott's formulation. (Marriott 1955).

Kerkennah's self-image, not as a sacred place, but as a source of orthodoxy, does not exclude it from also participating in "popular" Islamic practices. As many scholars of North African Islam have recently argued, puritan orthodoxy and charismatic mysticism are not necessarily exclusive religious styles, but part of a repertoire from which people often make different choices in different contexts. In his recent survey of Middle East anthropology, Eickelman generalizes,

> "Although in practice recent studies of anthropologists and social historians of Islam differ widely from each other in analytic assumptions, they suggest that in almost every studied locale there are opposing conceptions of Islam. These opposing (or

complementary) conceptions of Islam are distinguished by greater (particularistic) and lesser (universalistic) degrees of compromise with the social order. These opposing conceptions are co-present and in dynamic tension with each other." (1981:203).

In her study of a Sufi shrine in modern Tunis, Pamela Johnson stresses that these opposing (or complementary) styles are often "co-present" in a single individual.

"Nor do categories of the popular and the orthodox define distinct groups of participants. ....Beyond this, individual religious identity is itself flexible. The imam is also the Sheykh of a Sufi brotherhood, the pilgrim to Mecca is also a medium. Participation in religious organizations does not imply membership in a corporate group. For example, individuals may be linked to a variety of shrines through a constellation of kinship, residential and personal ties. Which ties an individual activates depends on such variables as age, sex, class and personal situation. " (1979:201-2).

I.M. Lewis in his comparative work on marginal religious practices and possesion cults, focuses on the way in which men and women often participate in a religious division of labor between orthodoxy and mysticism which affords indirect benefits to the "opposing" camps.

"My own alternative perspective suggests that the ecstatic women's cults have a direct appeal precisely to the wives of the more orthodox men - the models of Islamic respectability - while indirectly offering the latter the privilege of vicarious participation in what they ostensibly condemn as superstition and heresy. Thus, if there is a dual spiritual economy, its two branches are interdependent and complementary." (1986:106).

We turn now to an account of the cult of the saints in Kerkennah life and its relation to other styles of religiousity.

## THE CULT OF THE SAINTS

The Little Tradition of popular Islam in North Africa usually refers to maraboutism or the cult of the saints. Marabout is a French word from the Arabic murabit (literally, meaning to be bound or tied) referring to a person "living or dead to whom is attributed a special relation toward God which makes them particularly well placed to serve as intermediaries with the supernatural and to communicate God's grace (baraka) to their clients." (Eickelman 1976:6).

Marabouts or saints are associated with a wide range of religious activities from highly organized Sufi brotherhoods (tariqas), regional and local pilgrimages, Arab medicine and traditional healing, to individual covenants with the saint. Perhaps the most striking characteristic of the cult of the saints is its elasticity in being able to "house" such a variety of operations and to shift its focus according to changes in local historical circumstances without being displaced. This is because the cult of the saints is designed and redesigned from the ground up and remains under the direct control of the people who participate in it. This is congruent with the essential feature of all saints' cults: direct access to the supernatural and sacred.

Although it is a pan-North African phenomonon, as has been extensively documented in the noted study of Emile Dermenghem (1954) as well as many others, the cult of the

saints is all about the **particular**: the individual attributes of the specific saint, and the individual needs of the specific devotee. Its parochialness makes it both flexible and highly responsive.

On Kerkennah over the last forty or fifty years, the focus of the cult of the saints has shifted away from participation in the male dominated gatherings of Sufi brotherhoods toward individual pious visits (ziyara) to saints' shrines. (Louis 1963:2:411). Even when Louis was doing his study of Kerkennah starting in the 1940's, Sufi practices had already declined.

Kerkennah is a typical North African rural society in that its terrain is dotted with white domed shrines (qubbas) housing the tombs of saints or walis, as they are known locally, whom, in the classical tradition, the Kerkennis describe as "friends of the Prophet." Kerkennis carefully explain that walis are men and women with miraculous attributes and religious power, but not prophets, because Mohammed was the last prophet, and not worshipped, because there is no god but Allah to be worshipped. The more substantial of these shrines are called zawiyas. There are also tombless shrines inhabited by the spirits of certain walis which are only a pile of rocks, a palm tree, or a well. For example, in Kellabine, Sidi Said is a pile of rocks and Laila Halima is sakuma tree.

There are well over one hundred walis on Kerkennah

with a variety of origin legends and mystical specialties. True to the North African pattern, many walis arrived on Kerkennah in some miraculous fashion either before or after their deaths or conjured up some miraculous power with which they defended the islands against intruders and enemies. The historical context of these heroes is usually given vaguely and interchangeably as "from Roman times," "at the begining of time," or "from the time of the Prophet."

"During Roman times Sidi Bedou was fighting off the infidels and was killed and blown to bits. An angel told the people to go out at night and the bits that were Sidi Bedou would glow in the dark. The angel told them to gather them up and put them on a donkey and let the donkey wander until it stops. This is where they built his shrine."

"A soldier came from Egypt to defend Kerkennah against the invading Spaniards. When it looked as if the islands would be overrun, he called to God and turned a thousand palm trees into men and the Spaniards were defeated. He was then known as Sidi Alif Ennkhel which means master of a thousand palm trees."

Less frequently, walis of somewhat narrower popularity are identified as ancestors of specific Kerkenni families who led particularly meritorious lives. These are not, however, thought to be saintly lineages with sainthood being passed down the generations. Some walis are thought to be related to each other, but not necessarily to have Kerkenni descendants. Sidi Ali Twil, Sidi Mohammed Ezzraïa, and Sidi Fredj are said to be brothers and to support each others' miraculous efforts.

Saints' names recur all over North Africa and even

within the confines of Kerkennah as do the kinds of stories accounting for their sainthood. When asked if Sidi Fredj of Kerkennah is the same as the prominent Sidi Fredj of Tunis studied by Paques (1964), or if the two Sidi Messaouds on Kerkennah are the same saint, Kerkennis invariably say "no." This does not mean that they did not originally have a common inspiration, but once they are established with their own shrine, they are treated as autonomous and unique.

Some walis have no story of their arrival attached to them, but are known for having miraculous powers to deal with specific social, spiritual, and physical complaints. Sidi Ali Khanfir of Cherqui is known as a refuge for girls being forced to marry against their wills. Lalla Sabiya specializes in unmarried women in need of a husband. Sidi Ameur ben Attouch of Remla is visited by people with rheumatism and bone complaints. Different people give different accounts of the same walis and some people can give no account of the wali to whom they are devoted. This flexibility of account is consistent with the flexible purposes to which the walis are put by their devotees.

Baraka (religious blessing or grace) and karamat (miracles including healing) are the two general kinds of benefits Kerkennis mostly seek from the walis. Mystical union with God in a trance state (ahwal) through the aid of the wali is less common, although it still takes place

in certain circumstances. Organized Sufi brotherhood rituals including ecstatic dancing and self-mutilation are on the periphery of Kerkenni religious experience in the sense that they are either distant in people's memories or they are known to be taking place elsewhere.

According to the Kerkennis, there are no living saints on Kerkennah or on the mainland, nor are there new saints being established after their deaths. (This, however, does not diminish the importance of the saints who are already established on the islands, nor mean that the existing saints are invulnerable to fluctuations of popularity.) The reasons given for the non-proliferation of saints are secularization and modernization, including the government's discouragement of saints' cult activity.

"There are no saints today. The saints came from foreign lands and settled here. They gave people money and were good men. When they died, the people built the zawiyas for them. Today there are no saints because everyone reads and writes. They know about foreign lands from television and radio. Foreigners aren't rare."

"People don't do these things [ecstatic activity] anymore because their international education separates them from their religion."

"Living" saints are associated with Sufi brotherhoods which are no longer active on Kerkennah. So while Kerkennis say that the mystical practices associated with active brotherhoods have declined, they recognize that this is not so everywhere.

"In Tunis and Sfax people believe the saints' spirits are alive and about. They still do a lot of dancing."

"It's [ecstatic dancing] completely finished on

Kerkennah now because the ma`tamad (regional official) doesn't like it. They still do it in Sfax because its a big place and the government doesn't know."

"The government doesn't like it because people spend money on the saint and the music that they should be spending on improving the family's life style."

While the government has argued that the cult of the saints is both anti-modern and anti-Islamic, the Kerkennis do not perceive a conflict between the mosque and the zawiya. None of this brings into question whether the saints actually **exist.** There is a continuum of positions on the power of the saints ranging from a very low-key image of the saint as a good Muslim to the saint as a powerful miracle worker. There is a minimum consensus on Kerkennah, however, that saints are benign and carry religious blessing (baraka).

"People go to the zawiya to be close to God. The wali is a friend of the Prophet. The mosque is God's house - the closest place."

"The ma`tamad said there are no saints. That same night he became gravely ill. But he still says they don't exist. This is ridiculous because there are more than ten in Ouled Bou Ali alone."

Kerkennah fits into the general pattern in contemporary Tunisia of a decline in the religious brotherhoods in the rural areas and a resurgence in the cities. (Ferchiou 1972, Johnson 1981, Jones 1977, Abu Zahra 1982). Many Kerkenni men in their sixties and seventies recall the gatherings (hadara) of the `Isawiyya brotherhood (founded by the Moroccan saint, Sidi ben `Isa, in the 16th century). (The hadara were an

exclusively male gathering, although women sometimes observed from afar). Male followers of the Sufi path (tariqa) performed the trance (takhmir) inducing chants (dhikr), songs, music and dances (hizb) which allowed certain adepts to submit themselves to various forms of self-mutilation. These acts included eating cactus and live scorpions, piercing the cheek with a needle or stomach with a knife.

A number of men admitted to doing these things themselves. "I pierced my cheek in ecstasy. I could do it because of the way I was talking to the saint. It healed in two days." Mostly they say that the Kerkenni men who knew how to perform these miraculous feats are now dead.

There is no remnant of organized brotherhood activity on Kerkennah. The songs of the brotherhoods are all that remain of the hadara. These are sung at circumcisions, weddings and other communal rituals such as the return from the hajj. The music can still induce ecstatic dancing and trance in certain people, but no acts of self-mutilation. The names of the brotherhoods now stand for the types of music and songs that each is known for. (Lura Jafran Jones [1977] has done a study of the development and diffusion of `Isawiya music in Tunisia). Sometimes wedding musicians will play an "`Isawiyya" or a "Sulamiyya" very fast in the hope of inducing someone whom they know is vulnerable to trance to become

possessed and dance ecstatically. No particular category of the population seemed to be more vulnerable to this kind of individual trance than another. I saw men and women, married and unmarried, modern (including a policeman) and traditional individuals dance ecstatically at weddings and circumcisions provoked by the "`Isawiyya." While thought to be authentic possesion, it is also considered entertaining and exciting at a wedding or circumcision party.

Although the male hadara associated with the Sufi brotherhoods have declined, other interactions with the saints have not and in some cases, they have increased. These interactions include a number of forms of pilgrimage to the saints' shrine called ziyara (literally, visits). While not exclusive to them, women tend overwhelmingly to initiate and dominate these ziyara. Also, more often than not, women are the guardians (hafiza) of the saints' shrines. Depending on the importance of the shrine, this position can be given to a woman (often a widow) almost as an act of charity from the community because she collects a small sum (futuhat) from each visitor, or it can be a highly respected position if she is also a knowledgable healer (tbiba `arabi).

There are seven main categories of ziyara which invoke a one-to-one relationship with the saint in question. The most common is a private appeal for the

saint's intercession in some personal circumstance or crisis. These could be appeals for help with a son's baccalaureate examination, an errant husband, a longed for pregnancy, or any other area of life over which one has insufficient control.

These appeals are often accompanied by a promise (wa`ada) made to the saint to make a charitable offering (saddaq) to him if he answers the prayers of the suppliant. I know of no wa`adas being made by men, but many of the appeals are made on their behalf, and in this sense, they are passive participants in the relationship with the saint. The promise is symbolized by a knot tied in one of the flags which are draped over the saint's tomb or a strip of the woman's clothing knotted to the door or window of the shrine. The woman has "bound" herself and her fortunes to the saint. There is not necessarily a time limit attached to the wa`ada, but an affliction or personal disaster is sometimes attributed to an unfulfilled wa`ada. I heard tales of women's children dying because they had not fulfilled their "covenant" with the saint. One woman visiting Sidi Messaoud in El Attaya was belatedly fulfilling a wa`ada she had which "resulted" in the birth of her daughter. Her daughter, now twenty, was in the hospital and the mother interpreted this illness as a demand from Sidi Messaoud that her half of the promise be kept.

The second kind of ziyara is the fulfillment of the

wa`ada. Depending on what was promised, the saddaq can be anything from a plate of couscous to a ritually slaughtered sheep. In all cases, the offering is dedicated to the saint and the food is shared with other parties at the zawiya and/or the poor in the village. The women fulfilling the promise and her companions (usually women friends and close family members, sometimes including men) also eat some of the food, but the first order of business is to share it. The knot is untied.

Pursuit of a cure for physical ailments is a third type of ziyara. The ailing person, almost always a woman, comes to the zawiya seeking not just the intercession of the saint with God, but actual medical treatment in the form of the saint's water, incense, oils, and perfumes which have been left as saddaq by other devotees. The guardian of the zawiya often has special knowledge of traditional medicine and she will direct the inhaling of incense or massage the joints with the saint's olive oil. There are countless healing procedures that are also self-administered including sleeping next to the tomb of the saint.

Often a family will develop a special relationship with a particular saint based on a chain of successful intercessions and this will result in a fourth type of ziyara. These are periodic or annual family pilgrimages which are both commemorative and prophylactic. A woman

living in Sfax married to a man originally from Ouled Bou Ali explained her annual ziyara to Sidi Ali Twil in Ouled Bou Ali.

"I go to Sidi Ali Twil every year because my mother-in-law had two daughters and was praying for a son. My husband was born and she visited the saint every year after that even though she lived in Sfax. I used to go there with her and now that she's dead, I go there in her place and my daughter comes with me. It's always good for my health." We always slaughter a sheep and stay for a week."

Many of these family pilgrimages take on the aspect of a summer holiday particularly if their favorite saint has a large zawiya by the sea. This is a common way for mainland Kerkennis to maintain an active connection with the islands which is not just based on kin ties. Contributions to the saint are redistributed in the local community associated with that saint through payments to the guardian and offerings to the poor of that village. The community's stature is enhanced by the popularity of its saints.

There are at least five large seaside zawiyas which particularly attract visitors from afar who come for an extended stay. People talk about the ambiance (jau) of a zawiya as well as the baraka of the saint. It is characteristic of the flexibility of the cult of the saints to offer "something for everybody" and the fact that young men might come with their mothers as much for the swimming as for the baraka only broadens the saint's appeal.

It was mentioned in Chapter Three that zawiyas are often incorporated into the circumcision and wedding rituals and this is a fifth type of ziyara. Once again, long-term family loyalty to a particular saint often draws mainland Kerkennis back to the islands for these important events, reinforcing the threads of connection.

A sixth form of visit is the annual communal pilgrimage on the saint's special day which is called a zerda. Only the major zawiyas have these festivals, hence they are more common on the mainland than they are on Kerkennah. These festivals often draw people from other parts of the country including musicians associated with different Sufi brotherhoods. All of the possible forms of maraboutic activity take place at these festivals: hadara, ecstatic dancing, healing, animal sacrifices, and individual acts of devotion. There is no other kind of magnet in Tunisian life which attracts such large numbers of heterogeneous groups. For this reason, the major zerdas have been viewed by the Tunisian government (as they were by the French administration before them) as dangerous sources of political opposition. Consequently, the zerdas have been strictly monitored and often banned by the government.

Just as mainland Kerkennis and also non-Kerkennis make ziyaras to saints on the islands, Kerkennis go to the mainland for saintly purposes. Sidi Mansour is a large zawiya ten kilometers north of Sfax much favored

by Kerkennis because he is thought to have special protective powers for people who work on the sea. Many mainland and island Kerkennis, along with hundreds of other Tunisians, are devoted to Sidi Mansour and attend his annual zerda. There are a number of other favorite saints in Sfax especially those with curative specialties. An example is Sidi Bel Hassen who specializes in skin diseases and whose well water is bathed in and brought home as a medicine. The need to attend different specialist zawiyas for medical reasons and to respond to the call of saints who appear in dreams offer women a kind of mobility in the wider social world, including the mainland, which they would not have otherwise.

This point is related to the seventh category of ziyara which is the general use of the zawiya as a women's coffee house. Women often make casual visits to the zawiya for the general benefit of the saint's baraka, but also because it is the only acceptable public place where they can go to socialize. This social function of the zawiya has been noted by numerous others including Ferchiou (1972:68), Maher (1974:98), and Johnson (1980:141).

Because the saint is a refuge for all, women meet a wider range of people there than they do in their other activities which are largely confined to the household and neighborhood. The atmosphere on these occasions is

free and often quite bawdy with much mimicry of absent people. Every village has a few elderly women, usually widowed or divorced (that is, socially marginal), who play the role of joker. Their persona is the opposite of the young female ideal, and in another way, the inverse of the elderly hajja. In other words, they are loud, make sexual jokes including obscene prancing about, and play practical jokes. These well-known characters are often present at the zawiyas and much appreciated for their entertainment value.

Other restraints are lowered within the refuge of the zawiya. In general, women on Kerkennah do not go wading or swimming, but young unmarried women sometimes bathe in the sea under the special protection of the saint. Sophie Ferchiou (1972) emphasizes the liberating and sexually expressive aspect of female religious comportment in terms of possession dancing associated with the cult of the saints. I would extend this formulation to include non-ecstatic female participation in the cult of the saints as well.

The cult of the saints has many attractions which show no signs of dying out. People, especially women go to the saints to ask for something out of the ordinary, that is not available from any other source. The saint has to do with the possibility of miracles, good luck, and gratuitous blessing. In the face of life's uncertainties, which are clearly increasing, the saints

represent not only a refuge, but an immediate source of hope about the future. It is significant that the saint is usually linked to the locality through some accidental heroic formula rather than through descent. This is certainly true for all of the major saints on Kerkennah. The saint is attached to Kerkennah through an act of grace which is the very reason that Kerkennis attach themselves to the saint.

Emanuel Marx, in his study of tribal pilgrimages to saints' tombs in South Sinai (1977, 1985), has stressed the importance of the saints in that area being connected to the tribes through an indeterminate identification with the region rather than through agnation. The significance of this is that while the saint "intercedes with God on behalf of his tribe, he also works on behalf of the individuals from any tribe, and is thus never an exclusive patron of his own people." (1985:128). Marx argues that the saint represents the interdependence between the tribe and and the wider region which currently includes the alien, bureaucratically controlled world to which they periodically migrate for wage labor.

Local saints on Kerkennah are similarly identified with the place which they sanctify, but they are not exclusive to it. This means that simultaneously each individual has as good a chance as any other to receive the saint's blessing and still claims the benefits of a

special relationship. The saints represent both a local anchor **and** spiritual mobility, especially for women. They are similar to the tribal saints of South Sinai in respect to their acting as an intercessing link between people on the ground and the remote God, and also as a clarifying link between the somewhat predictable local world and the precarious wider world of national institutions and social anonymity. In conclusion, we will look at attempts to homogenize this local world into this wider anonymous world.

## CHAPTER SIX

## THE "NEW" TRADITION AND THE FOLKLORIZATION OF CULTURE

### NORMATIVE ISLAM

Dale Eickelman has argued that a culture's image of what constitutes a normative, orthodox Islam is just as variable as that culture's Little Tradition interpretations of Islam. He holds that the important question to ask about Big Tradition Islam is why one interpretation of Islam is considered more normative than others at particular times and places. (1983:12).

Since Independence in 1956, in common with the governments of other Arab states, the Tunisian government has made a strong effort to influence and control what normative Islam in Tunisia should be. The government has promoted in a myriad of ways a literate, individualistic Islam and has tried to associate it with a scripturalist nationalism, to use Ernest Gellner's phrase. In other words, it has tried to select a version of Islam that would be an analogue to the educationally standardized, mobile, homogeneous requirements of a national culture focussed on industrial development. Industrialization is the essential precondition of nation-building according to Gellner's general theory of nationalism. (1983:19-

38).

Upon Independence, the new government institutionalized the policy that had been established by the French colonial government of marginalizing and undermining the Sufi brotherhoods and zawiyas in general. Having mobilized a grassroots opposition movement themselves, then as the Neo-Destour party, the new Tunisian government knew only too well what a threatening source of internal opposition these institutions could be. So, in the name of Islamic orthodoxy , the turigas and zawiyas were proclaimed unIslamic.

The original Destour Party, founded in 1920 by Abd al-Aziz Thaalbi, was associated with the Arab-Islamic modernist movement as promoted by the late 19th century Egyptian reformist, Muhammed `Abduh. Thaalbi spoke out against maraboutism and advocated a rationalist interpretation of the Qur`an. (Green 1978:185).

In 1934, Habib Bourguiba founded the Neo-Destour Party, rejecting the reformist assimilationist policies of the parent Destour Party. He associated himself with the revolutionary values and tactics of Jamal al-Din al Afghani, who himself had broken away from the moderate `Abduh over the same issue of reform versus revolutionary action. Bourguiba understood that broad-based populist support was the only way to advance the independence movement. To achieve this, he distanced himself from the traditional intellectual and religious élites associated

with both the colonial government and the Destour Party and allied himself with the institutions of the "folk," which included the institutions of popular Islam.

In the early days of the Neo-Destour, Bourguiba defended the removal of naturalized French citizens from Muslim cemeteries as well as the veiling of women as an expression of Tunisian culture (in contrast to his presidential speech twenty years later denouncing the veil as a "filthy rag"). In this era, Bourguiba embraced the forms and language of a charisma-based Islam which would be familiar and sympathetic to the masses. He presented himself as the "supreme combatant" (el mujahid el akhbar), a revolutionary Islamic title which, in the current era, would put him in the uneasy company of Colonel Ghaddafi and the Ayatollah Khomeini.

With the success of the independence movement and the establishment of the single party government (the Socialist Destour Party since 1964), Bourguiba traded in the revolutionary Islam of al Afghani for the quietistic, neo-orthodoxy of `Abduh. Norma Salem holds that the "official" school of the history of the Tunisian nationalist movement has attempted to retroactively disengage Bourguiba from his earlier revolutionary religious stance and to paint a picture of consistent commitment to a cool, rationalist Islam. (Salem 1984:144).

With a healthy and intimate respect for the political

uses to which popular Islamic institutions could be put, President Bourguiba started a campaign to undermine the power and autonomy of grassroots Islam in Tunisia. This was institutionalized by outlawing many of the major annual saints' zerdas and the suppression of the hadara and hzib rituals of the Sufi brotherhoods. The government also placed responsibility for religious education in the hands of the Ministry of Education and in this way undermined the local Our`anic schools attached to local zawiyas and mosques. The zawiya system was more seriously dismantled by the abolition of the habus and nationalization of all the property held in these charitable trusts by the zawiyas and other religious organizations in 1957. The government assumed sponsorship of the mosques and schools that had been supported by the habus, thereby bringing them under government control. (Perkins 1986:118). Many zawiyas were converted into local party cells, clinics, school facilities, and other secular institutions dedicated to the public welfare.

While the government has tried to discredit and marginalize the zawiya system, it has strengthened and centralized the institution of the mosque, which is more easily controlled. It has tried to make the mosque the focus of religious energy. The independence of the mosques was ended by the establishment of a centralized Bureau for Religious Affairs under the direction of the

prime minister. The Bureau regulates many of the details of religious practice that used to be determined at the local level including the official times for prayers and fasting. Local imams must be approved by this bureau and they receive instructions for the recommended Friday sermon to be delivered nationwide in all of the local mosques. For this they receive a monthly stipend. Local mosques sometimes receive building grants from the government which they pay for indirectly by allowing the party to use the back rooms of the mosque as local cells and as party youth clubs. The Bureau for Religious Affairs also screens applications for the special passports which allow people to leave the country for the pilgrimage to Mecca, another way of monitoring and controlling the local religious life.

There are other ways in which the government has tried to intervene in individual religious practice and to shape what was called a "revitalized rationalistic" Islam. In a famous episode in 1960, President Bourguiba encouraged the country's workers to excuse themselves from the fast of Ramadan by declaring a holy war (jihad) against economic underdevelopment. (Zghal 1973: 231). Also in the interests of the national economy, Bourguiba launched a campaign to discourage the slaughtering of one sheep per household for the `Id el Kbir offering to sell ritually slaughtered meat by the kilo from government run butcher shops. In both of these cases, the

government's position was presented in the idiom of religion. Particular use was made of the concept of fard kifaya, meaning collective duty. It applies to religious obligations which, if fulfilled by a sufficient number of individuals, other individuals are excused from fulfilling. Fard kifaya would normally apply to obligations such as funeral prayers and holy war. Bourguiba attempted idiomatically to incorporate the requirements of economic development into the concept of religious obligations. Neither of these campaigns was successful and ultimately caused the population to distrust the government's alleged religious motives even when they often could not resist its measures.

The new government was more successful in its presentation of the Personal Status Code of 1957 as a religious instrument giving legal weight to what previously had been simply moral injunctions in the Our`an. (Salem 1984a:151). Many of the religious rationales of the Code were taken from Tahar Haddad's famous book, Our Women in the Law and Society, which was widely denounced by the `ulama when it came out in 1930. The basic argument of this book is that both society and the law (shari`a) have betrayed the spirit of the Our`an and that the Our`an is meant to be interpreted in terms of historical contingiencies. Historical contingiencies and the spirit of the Our`an, according to Haddad and the formulators of the Code, demand that

women's rights be legally recognized and defended.

This legal code was the most progressive in the Arab world at that time with the exception of Turkey. Unlike the Tunisian code, the Turkish code of 1920 was framed in strictly secular terms, ignoring Islamic principles. From a religious point of view, the most important reforms of the Tunisian code were the prohibition of polygamy and unilateral divorce by repudiation, the adjustment of proportional inheritance between men and women, and the requirement of the consent of both parties to marriage.

One of the reasons why these reforms did not cause too much religious backlash is that they largely conformed with established social reality. Also, as Salem has pointed out, the reforms all apply to women as social actors (daughter, wife, mother) in the context of the nuclear family and that the Code reinforces the principle of the nuclear family as much as it emancipates women. (1984a:154). The prohibition on polygamy only affected 3% of the population and in the late 1950's Tunisia enjoyed a low divorce rate of 5%. (Salem 1984a:166). Other potentially disturbing reforms have been easily ignored because of the unwillingness of women to defy customary practice, as in the characteristic foresaking of even their Qur`anically guaranteed rights to inheritance.

In keeping with its declaration of Islam as the state

religion, the Tunisian government set itself up as the guardian of Islamic orthodoxy and authority on normative practice. In formulating the Personal Status Code, it put itself in the position of reinterpreting the Our`an on behalf of the Tunisian people. By centralizing religious institutions, standardizing sermons and religious curricula, and presenting its own policies in religious formulae, the government has tried to **become**, not just control, the Big Tradition. Its credibility as the voice of normative Islam has been compromised, however, by its parallel agenda of creating a new, largely secular, national tradition.

## THE INVENTION OF THE NEW TRADITION

The symbols of this new tradition are largely generated out of the struggle for independence and what Bourguiba has promoted as the unique Tunisian personality, the result of Tunisia's historical position at the crossroads of many cultures. The government has created an annual cycle of national holidays accompanied by monuments and festivals dedicated to secular national heroes and causes. These include Revolution Day, Independence Day, Martrys Day (heroes of the independence movement), Labor Day, the National Holiday (two days), Bourguiba's Birthday, Women's Day (the Personal Status Code), Commemoration of the Foundation of Freedom (the Neo-Destour Party in 1934), and Evacuation Day

(withdrawal of the French army). Significantly, these holidays are not on the Islamic calendar which the government dropped on 1966. Streets, parks, and buildings all over the country have been renamed, most often after Bourguiba, but also after the heroes of independence including Farhat Hached, Mongi Slim, Habib Thameur, and Hedi Chaker.

The explicit goal of these rituals and symbols is to create a primary loyalty to a national, culturally homogeneous identity. Implicitly this entails a campaign against the competing claims on people's primary loyalty, both internal (local identity) and external (pan-Islam). Obviously, the new tradition does not want to destroy these important sources of cultural energy, but it wants to control them. Seeming to "become" the big tradition of official Islam is one way to deal with the competition.

But what about the deeply embedded loyalty to local culture? One approach is to domesticate local culture by turning it into folklore. While offically presented as attempts to preserve distinctive local customs from extinction, there are many instances in which the opposite is happening. In other words, something that is organic and vital is dissected and put into a preservative solution which, in fact, kills (or weakens) it. In some cases, this seems to be intentional as in the deflation of the potentially dangerous Sufi brotherhoods,

and in other cases, it seems to be a repercussion of a general policy of uniform "cultural development."

While the religious brotherhoods and the cult of the saints have generally been suppressed by the government, certain of their ritual elements have been lifted out of context and grafted onto the rituals of the new tradition. This is both a placatory move and an attempt to borrow from the established appeal of these pieces of ritual. The secularizing of the `Issawiyya and Sulamiyya music by making them part of folkloric performances on television is one example. Putting those zerdas which have been allowed to continue under the strict control of the Ministry of Culture is another. These zerdas then become highly organized government events at which the attending officials are paid more homage than the saint.

The most striking example of the syncretistic use of the little tradition by the new tradition, however, is the cult of personality surrounding President Bourguiba. While he is certainly a legitimate national hero with an authentic following, the building of a multi-million dinar zawiya style mausoleum in his hometown of Monastir was not a spontaneous, popular action on the part of his devotees. The annual celebration of the President's birthday, which receives a great deal of media attention, often has little tradition Islamic elements mixed in with it such as the singing of the mulid and dervish style dancing from the hzib.

It is not clear how successful this new "cult" is. Most Kerkennis did not know when any of the national holidays were, and when they did occur and the bureaucracy and schools closed, they usually could not say why. Commemorations to do with the martyred founder of the trade union (U.G.T.T.), Farhat Hached, are an exception because he was a "local boy," (wild el blad).

In the 1970's the government instituted a program of regional festivals to celebrate local customs. These festivals were designed to take the place of the zerdas that had been outlawed, to promote tourism, and to encourage a uniform level of cultural development by treating all regions as comparable units. Attempts such as the folklore festivals to treat all regions with equal "respect" as contributors to the collective cultural repertoire have a serious political agenda underlying them as well.

There is a critical north/south cultural and economic divide in Tunisia which is politically explosive. The north is fertile and highly developed industrially. The south is barren, underdeveloped, and suffers from a strong sense of being politically disenfranchised. (The attempt by Libyan trained Tunisian dissidents to take over the southern city of Gafsa in 1980 was a dire warning to the government of the depth of discontent.) The regional festivals are a way for the new national tradition to symbolically enfranchise the outlying

areas. This is done by highlighting their distinctiveness on one level and homogenizing them into the cultural repertoire of the nation on another. In doing this, the real power of local identity is patronized and trivialized.

Kerkennah is on the border of the north-south divide. It shares the problems of high unemployment, underdevelopment, and consequent labor migration common to all of southern Tunisia. It suffers from a sense of political disenfranchisement both from the national government and the regional government headquartered in Sfax. Historically, they see themselves as having played an important part in the independence movement mainly through their link with the U.G.T.T. In the current era of troubled relations between the union and the government, however, this connection contributes as much to a sense of beleaguerment as it does to national pride. The government crushed the only general strike in post-independence Tunisian history on January 26, 1978, now known as Black Thursday. This clash resulted in hundreds of casualties and was followed by the imprisonment of the U.G.T.T. leaders including the Kerkenni leader, Habib Ashour, months of strict curfews, and the rounding up of unemployed young men against their will into government work schemes. All of this has contributed to a disaffected atmosphere.

Accompanying these problems is a fierce and

persistent sense of local identity. As I have tried to demonstrate, Kerkenni rituals of both the big and little traditions are fueled by this local loyalty. The local character that the regional festivals of the new national tradition aim to celebrate is something quite different.

## "Fête Folklorique"

Three days of events were scheduled for the Kerkenni regional festival in the summer of 1978. The festival began with the arrival of two ministers and the governor of Sfax at the port at Sidi Youssef on a specially scheduled ferry. All of the girls involved in rural development projects including the seamstress school and the rug weaving program were strongly encouraged, although at their own expense, to take the bus to the port to be part of the welcoming ceremony. The motorcade, with sirens and police escort, made its way along the parade route, the single road that runs the length of both islands. At certain key places along the route, Tunisian flags and pictures of Bourguiba were posted. A white dividing line had been painted down the middle of the road to make it look like a modern street or highway. Each village along the parade route was responsible for a typical bit of "folklore" such as throwing a fishing net, demonstrating the wedding jeffa, or playing some Kerkenni music.

Upon arrival at the highly decorated administrative

district in Remla, the official entourage held a ceremony in the party headquarters called the dar sha`ab, meaning the "people's house." The purpose of this event was to make an annual report of the benefits the government had brought to the islands and to make a number of presentations. The audience consisted of all the government employees, party activists, and those citizens notified by their local omda that they should attend.

Throughout the address, whenever a minister or governor's name was mentioned, the audience automatically clapped and the women you youed. Three televisions were presented to be installed in three village party cells. (Television only arrived on Kerkennah in 1975 and relatively few homes had them, so it had considerable enticement value for the local party cell.) Then, people who had recently acquired government subsidized housing were called forward to be congratulated on their good fortune and receive symbolic keys. (On other occasions when the government had aid in the form of grain, blocks of cheese and dried milk, or farming tools to distribute, it would hold a ceremony at which the needy recipients, selected by the omda, would be gathered to publicly receive the state mediated charity.) The ceremony ended with a prayer from the Qur`an.

In the afternoon a soccer match was scheduled between a Kerkenni team and a Libyan team which drew literally

the entire young male Kerkenni population. Unfortunately, the Libyan team did not show up and after several hours delay, the Kerkennis played against themselves.

On the evening of the first day, a "Miss Kerkennah" beauty contest was scheduled at the Grand Hotel. Throughout the day, the festival organizers scoured the villages for willing contestants. This was the best attended event of the Kerkenni Folklore Festival, but in the end, a German tourist was named Miss Kerkennah because as the policeman on guard proudly told me, "No Kerkenni girl would even dream of participating in such a scandal."

On the second day there was a fluka race, putting the Kerkenni fishing boats to a completely new use and a poetry reading by a number of Kerkenni poets who included two school teachers, an imam, and the island party head.

That evening a widely publicized but poorly attended pageant called , "Fête locale et mariage traditionel," was held in the dar sha`ab. Girls from the lycée modelled the traditional Kerkenni wedding dresses, shawls, and jewelry while a band of local musicians played a series of traditional wedding songs. The irony of this event was that they were almost drowned out by the noise of the real weddings taking place in the streets, courtyards, and rooftops on that summer night in the middle of the wedding season.

The next day, the officials were called back to the mainland early and upon their departure, the festival, inspite of the events scheduled for the third day, came to an abrupt halt.

In their study of secular rituals (or collective ceremonies) as instruments which can traditionalize new material, Sally Falk Moore and Barbara Meyrhoff identify six formal properties of such events: 1) repetition, 2) acting, 3) stylized or special behavior, 4) order, 5) evocative presentational style (producing an attentive state of mind and focus of attention), and 6) collective dimension (social meaning). (1977:7-8).

Among the many confusing aspects of the new tradition Kerkenni festival was its lack of focus and direction, Moore and Meyrhoff's properties 5 and 6. It was impossible to determine who the festival was for. Was it by the islanders for the ministers? Was it by the government for the islanders? It certainly was not by the islanders for themselves (except accidentally in the case of the football match). It is a characteristic of all kinds of rituals that they can achieve and communicate many things at once, but they do this by a narrowing of focus which lines up the different agenda of the ritual, producing an aesthetically charged **coincidence** of meaning. (Scott Borg, personal communication).

No such coincidence of meaning was possible in the

Kerkenni festival for two reasons. One is that the government was trying to simultaneously put new meaning into old containers and old meaning into new containers, creating an aesthetic conflict rather than coincidence. The second is that the old containers they were trying to fill with new meaning were still full of old meaning. Treating the fishing techniques and boats which are part of the functioning local economy as sport and folklore is an example of trying to put new meaning into an old container. Giving charity (zakat) to the poor in a public ceremony is an example of putting old meaning into a new container. Holding a pageant of the dissected pieces of the wedding ritual while the organic whole was throbbing (loudly) with life down the road is an example of trying to fill a container that is still full.

Eric Hobsbawm's recent work on the invention of tradition is relevant to this discussion. (1983). He makes a useful distiction between tradition and custom.

"`Custom' in traditional societies has the double function of motor and fly-wheel. It does not preclude innovation and change up to a point, though evidently the requirement that it must appear compatible or even identical with precedent imposes substantial limitations on it. What it does is to give any desired change (or resistance to innovation) the sanction of precedent, social continuity and natural law as expressed in history." (1983:2).

"`Invented tradition' is taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour which automatically implies continuity with the past.... The object and characteristic of `traditions" , including invented ones is invariance." (1983:1-2).

The critical point is that while traditions can be invented, customs cannot and consequently, customs cannot be replaced by traditions. In the case of the Kerkenni festival, the government was trying to empty the cup of custom and fill it with (new) tradition by turning local culture into folklore.

## THE POWER OF LOCAL IDENTITY

There is no question that the Tunisian state has been able to enhance its legitimacy by building a "suitable history" out of Carthaginian, Berber, and Ottoman heroes (Hannibal, the prophetess Kahina, and Kheireddine Pasha are favorites) as well as the struggle for independence. There is also no question that the values of literacy, mobility, and individualism necessary to industrialization which the new tradition seeks to inculcate have had a significant impact on Kerkennah culture. However, there are critical ways in which the new tradition has not been able to outflank the big tradition or domesticate the little tradition.

In trying to outflank the big tradition, the government has treated Islam as a dependent variable in relation to the national identity. Many Tunisians have found this marginalizing of religion unacceptable. Disillusionment about modernization, growing unemployment, and increasing social and economic inequality have added to the sense of scepticism and even

betrayal, driving people to look for alternatives to the new tradition. One alternative which is particularly available to the educated young is anti-nationalistic Islamic fundamentalism. The number of people choosing this as their primary identity has been on the rise since this research was done. (Tessler 1980). A less radical alternative is to turn back to the values and structures of the local culture. Abdelqadr Zghal, in his paper entitled, "The Reactivation of Tradition in a Post-Traditional Society," reported a retreat to regionalism even among the ruling elite as a basis for the formation of coalitions. (1972:234).

Motivation to retreat to local structures exists on many levels in the case of the Kerkenni population. In their forays into the urban and industrial domains of the mainland, Kerkennis have found their economic and political mobility lubricated as much by local networks as they have by access to the anonymous educational system. The relative efficacy of networks based on place of origin has motivated mainland Kerkennis to legitimate their "Kerkenniness" through energetic local participation in big tradition Islamic and life cycle rituals.

The version of big tradition Islam that the state has endorsed is highly centralized, individualistic and literate. It is an Islam that minimizes the importance of the community both theologically and politically. In

this sense it is unsatisfactory and unconvincing to the Kerkennis. As presented in Chapter Three, the community is a central dynamic image of Kerkennah culture and critical to their version of Islamic orthodoxy. While Kerkennis necessarily cooperate with the explicit restrictions on religious practice imposed by the state, they have compensated by maximizing the "community content" of their Islamic and life cycle rituals. They have retreated to their little tradition to preserve their big tradition.

Both the maximization of the "community content" of the big tradition and the mobilization of local networks put orality rather than literacy in high relief. The spoken event releases the sacred power of the scriptural tradition and the orality of the face-to-face community is the only protection against what for Kerkennis is the most threatening and repugnant feature of the new tradition: anonymity.

## GLOSSARY

| | |
|---|---|
| adha | sacrifice |
| `adl | sound witness |
| `ain | evil eye |
| akhlaq | character, morality, deportment |
| `ālm | wisdom |
| `aql | intelligence, responsibility |
| `arsh | patrilineal descent group |
| `ayish | life |
| bahira | lake |
| balagha | eloquence, maturity |
| baraka | blessing, grace |
| basīra | judgement, perception |
| bātil | invalid |
| bint el blad | native daughter |
| blad | homeland |
| dār | house, family, extended family |
| dinya ra'yda | peaceful conditions |
| drina | fish trap woven from palm branches |
| fātiha | opening verse of the Qur'an |
| fellah / fellahah (f.) | farmer |
| fluka | small sailboat |
| ghsul | ablution |
| habūs | unalienable religious endowment |
| hadara | gathering for performance of Sufi ritual |
| hadīth | historical traditions deriving from the Prophet |
| hafīza | guardian (f.) |
| harām | forbidden |
| hejāb | amulet |
| hishma | modesty, shame |
| hiyāt en nass | way of life |
| jāmi'a | community |
| jau | atmosphere, ambiance |
| jinn / jnun (pl.) | invisible spirits, either harmful or helpful |
| kalima | word |
| karama / karamāt (pl.) | miracle |
| kbār | influential people |
| khidma | work |
| klam en nass | gossip |
| ktif | influence, (lit. shoulder) |
| lagmi | palm wine |
| lūd | shallow hulled sailboat of Kerkenni design |
| maktūb | predetermined (lit. written) |

| | |
|---|---|
| mandūb | recommended religious practice |
| mashru` | project, enterprise |
| ma`tamad | regional delegate |
| ma`tamdiyya | regional delegation of the governorate |
| meddeb | Qur'an teacher |
| mezuit | bagpipes, party at which bagpipes are played |
| muezzin | announcer of the prayers |
| muftirat | rules of abstinence including the fast |
| mūlid | birthday, song of the Prophet's birth |
| mustaqīm | the straight path, the one way |
| nafs | spirit, flesh centered self |
| niya | religious intention |
| omda | local government representative |
| qa`āda | sitting ceremony of a baby |
| qabbla | midwife |
| qada | completion, replacement days of the fast |
| raīs / raīsa (f.) | owner, boss |
| ra'y | opinion |
| rmu | contributions |
| rshiqa | reimbursible contributions |
| salāt | prayers |
| samah | peace offering |
| sawm | fast |
| sdaq | contract |
| sebkha | salt flats |
| shahāda | confession of faith |
| sharfiyya | fixed fisheries made of lashed palm fences |
| sharāf | honor |
| sharī`a | Islamic law |
| shītan | devil |
| sih | valid, sound |
| tahāra | circumcision |
| tarīqa | Sufi order |
| tbib `arabī / tbiba `arabī (f.) | traditional Islamic healer |
| wa`ada | covenant, promise to a saint |
| wad | river |
| wājib | obligation, requirement |
| wali | saint, friend of the Prophet |
| wild el blad | native son |
| zakāt | alms |
| zāwiya | saint's shrine |
| ziyāra | visit (to saint's shrine) |

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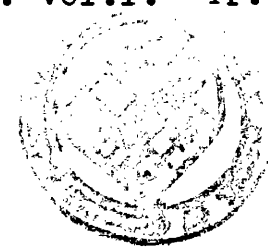

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